

Effective Cultural Messages: Improving Graduation Rates for Pacific Islander Students in Higher  
Education

A Thesis submitted to Southern Utah University in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Professional Communication - MAPC

April 2017

By

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We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts of Professional Communication.

Thesis Committee

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### Abstract

The largest problem facing the Pacific Islander (PI) community in the United States of America is the rate of graduation. The following statement is a disturbing statistic from a Chronicle of Higher Education article, *Pacific Islanders: A Misclassified People*: “For more than 20 years, U.S. Census data have shown that Pacific Islanders are far less likely to graduate from college ... The trend is that Pacific Islanders are about half as likely as the general population to hold bachelor's degrees, and even less likely to receive advanced degrees.” The reasoning for this statistic can vary from one idea to the next. This research gives a better understanding as to why Pacific Islander students are on average about half as likely as the general population to hold bachelor's degrees, and even less likely to receive advanced degrees.

There are three approaches that Pacific Islander students face daily: Ideological, Motivational, and Theological.

**Ideological:** is based on the idea of a perspective culture or relating to a system of ideas/ideals (What an education can do and the benefit of it).

**Motivational:** the reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way.

**Theological Approach:** Utilizing theology and spirituality to self-motivate to get something done.

The study showcases that Ideological, Motivational, and Theological Approaches help PI students understand that higher education is key to emphasizing the cultural approach in solving family matters.

### **Dedication**

First and foremost, praises and thanks to the God, the Almighty, for His showers of blessings throughout my final thesis to complete the research/case study successfully.

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my research chair, Dr. Art Challis, Professor and Chairman, Department of Communication, for giving me the opportunity to do research, and providing invaluable guidance throughout this research. His dynamism, vision, sincerity, and motivation have deeply inspired me. He has taught me the methodology to carry out the research, and present it clearly. It was a great privilege and honor to work and study under his guidance. I am extremely grateful for what Art has offered me. I would also like to thank him for his friendship, empathy, and great sense of humor.

My special thanks goes to my mentor, professor, and spiritual father, Rev. Professor Jonathan Holiman (Stephanie) for the love and support shown to me during my studies. I would like to say thanks to my friends, professors, and mentors, Provost, Dr. Bradley Cook, Communication Bridge Student Samantha Burfiend; Administrative Assistant Tammi Miller; Prof. Dr. Matt Barton; Prof. Dr. Jon Smith; Prof. Dr. Kevin Stein; Prof. Dr. Jung Jong; Vice-President, Mindy Benson; Rev. Havili Mone (Sela); and Lay-leader Viliami Hosea (Fusi), for their constant encouragement and support. I express my special thanks to the Laumalie Ma'oni'oni Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, for supporting me through my educational journey. I am extending my thanks to the Disability & Resource Center (Carmen Alldredge), TRIO/Student Support Center (Lynne Brown), and the Center for Diversity & Inclusion (Talia Strong) for their support during my studies here at SUU. Finally, my thanks goes to all the people who have supported me to complete this research work directly or indirectly.

I would like to conclude my heartfelt appreciation to my parents, Rev. Tu'uta Sekeni and Mele Tangikina Sekeni. I am extremely grateful for their love, prayers, caring and sacrifices for educating and preparing me for my future. Also, I express my thanks to my sisters, brother, and brother-in-laws for their support and valuable prayers: Ileini (Andrew) Tuli, Sinalelea (Samuela) Tu'aefe, Hauloto 'He Ofa Sekeni (Twin Sister), and Sosaia Ma'u Tapuaka Sekeni (Brother), Fa'ave O 'Hihifo Takai, Mele T. Takai, Tapule V. Takai, Heilala Fangupo, Brenna Jane Fangupo, and Patetefa Fangupo. I am very much thankful to my guardians, Amanaki and Mele Vunivola Takai, Hepisipa and Caroline Sekeni (all the Sekeni kids) for their love, understanding, prayers, and continuing support in my education.

*Rest in Peace to my two Grandfathers: Rev. Tevita Sekeni Sr. and Taniela Vatuniloka*

*Patetefa Fangupo.*

### **Introduction**

In today's societies, Pacific Islander students are facing many challenges in their daily lives. PI students struggle with a sense of place and belonging among their peers, due to language barriers, un-known learning disorders or disabilities, and many more. Students are asking themselves, "What will benefit my family more...work or school?" According to the U.S. National Data, "... 80% of Pacific Islanders and high school students aspire to a bachelor's degree or higher; however, only 45% enroll ...". The research below answers the reason why only 45 percent of PIs enroll in college, and will give a better understanding of the surface and deep culture. The Grid-group Cultural Theory will describe how different people are in the group and how they take on different roles.

The explanation of Surface culture is what people can see and perceive from others as the following: cultural attires, historical contributions outward displays of behavior, identity, etc. (Pratt-Johnson, 2006). Surface culture is essentially the most identifiable cultural norms in a foreign country. Deep culture is the intuitive truths reflected in the surface culture that people do not know and understand because they cannot see it physically (Pratt-Johnson, 2006). For Pacific Islander students, culture is a deciding factor on where to proceed after high school, work or education? In the U.S., Pacific Islanders are a diverse group, with varied cultures and ethnicities. Commonalities exist including a rich sense of history, deep ties to families, and high educational aspirations all indicating strong cultural assets despite troubling statistics (Sablan, 2015).

## **Tonga Translation**

### **‘Ulungaanga Fakafonua (Surface Culture)**

Ko e ‘ulungaanga fakafonua ko ‘eni, ko ha fahinga to’onga pē ‘ulungaanga angamaheni ‘oku ngaue ‘aki ‘e he kakai kā ‘oku ‘ikai kenau ‘ilo ki he mahu’inga ‘o e to’onga pe ‘ulungaanga ko ia. ‘Oku hangē nai ha’ a tau lava pe ke sio ki he funga mo’unga ka ‘oku ‘ikai ke tau ‘ilo ki he koloa ‘oku fufū mei loto.

### **‘Ulungaanga Fakafonua (Deep Culture)**

Ko e ‘ulungaanga fakafonua ko ‘eni, ko ha to’onga pē ‘ulungaanga ‘oku tauhi pau ‘eha toko taha pē ko ha toko lahi. Ko hono ‘uhinga he ‘oku nau ‘ilo ‘a hono tukufakaholo, pea ‘oku mahu’inga kia kinautolu ke tauhi he ko hono koloa ‘oku ‘aonga ki he me’a kotoa ‘oku hoko ‘i he mo’ui. ‘Oku hangē eni ko ha taha kuo ne ongosia ‘i hono keli ‘a e me’a hā mai ke ‘ilo ‘a e koloa ‘oku fufū ‘i he loto mo’unga.

## **Literature Review**

An article by Bennett, states and questions: “How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience? (Bennett, 1998).” According to the USC Rossier, School of Education: “...80% of Pacific Islanders and high school students aspire to a bachelor’s degree or higher; however, only 45% enroll...” Bennet also states that, college readiness or the preparation needed to enter and succeed in college, is a not only a crucial skill for today’s students but also unevenly distributed among racial groups. The USC Rossier tracked statistics that indicated that 85.4 percent of PIs have high school diplomas, 14.8 percent have a bachelor's degree, and only 4.7 percent have a graduate or professional degree.

In order to understand the reason for this problem, it is important to share some common



cultural experiences. According to the Granite School District in Salt Lake City, the reason students are not graduating is due to the following: academic, family, safety, economic, and social issues (Pacific Islander High School Dropout Rate Large in Utah, 2003). Nona Willis Aronowitz stated in an article, “Culturally, their families are tight, and there’s often pressure to stay at home to support the family rather than go off to college (Aronowitz, 2014).”

Boggs, S.T. (1985) goes into the case study that follows interactions of Hawaiian children at home compared to school.

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for more than 20 years, U.S. Census data have shown that PIs are far less likely to graduate from college than the general public. The Chronicle states: “Despite the clear data, Pacific Islanders are not eligible for many scholarships and fellowships designated for underrepresented minorities.” The data from *The Chronicle* also show that a Pacific Islander can be represented as an Asian-Pacific Islander, which Asians are not underrepresented. This misclassification of PIs can be detrimental to their community and education, due to the fact that the majority of the culture contains students who are the first in their family to attend university. Also, Asians are more than three times as likely as Pacific Islanders to hold bachelor’s degrees.

Hori (1997) created a brief bibliography addressing the cultural values and learning styles of students of minority languages and cultures in Hawaii, Filipinos, and Southeast Asians. Hori writes that his work does not look into Japanese, Chinese, and Korean groups due to the abundant amount of information on their cultures.

Family plays a very important role in barriers to education. Research shows that parental support can be very valuable in influencing prospective minority students’ future aspirations, expectations concerning education and academic achievement, and self-efficacy concerning

career decisions (Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008). According to (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009), parents of minority students have high ambitions for their children's academic accomplishment and success, and other family members also can influence the pursuit of education. Research has shown that Latino students, who have high-quality relationships with and receive academic support from their siblings, report higher levels of academic motivation than do those who do not (Alfaro & Umaña-Taylor, 2010). While family support has been shown to benefit minority students, parents may not be able to adequately support their children, which may put them at a disadvantage. A higher percentage of Hispanic and Black students come from families with fewer resources (low income and parents did not graduate) than do White and Asian (non PI) students, which can contribute to lower rates of college enrollment for ethnic minority students (Perna & Titus, 2005).

Learning outcomes are related directly to the processing of knowledge and information by students. In a higher education setting, racial and cultural diversity in the classroom and informal settings (e.g., interacting with diverse others on campus) have a positive effect on active thinking, motivation, and intellectual engagement (Gurin, et al., 2002). Other studies have found that greater frequency in cross-racial interactions in college is positively related to higher levels of growth in general knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and group skills (Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Bjorklund, & Parente, 2001). Thus, increasing diversity may increase knowledge and other learning outcomes for all students.

Feelings of stereotype threat in certain domains can lead to lower feelings of self-efficacy or a belief that one has the ability to actually perform well in a particular domain. Ethnic

minority students who have reported higher perceived barriers to education (e.g., lack of inclusion) also reported lower coping efficacy or confidence that they can manage these difficult situations (Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001; Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). Lower self-efficacy within a domain about which one is already unsure contributes to the gap between stigmatized and non-stigmatized students going into that particular domain. Similarly, students who feel threatened in a particular domain and have low efficacy may experience disidentification from that domain (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Those who do not identify with a domain tend to give up or fail to put forth a complete effort in this domain. Another consequence of having classrooms that do not feel inclusive to all students is the lack of retention of students from a diverse group into a particular field. This attrition has been seen for female and minority students in STEM fields and is commonly referred to as the “leaky pipeline” (Bond & Fotiyeva, 2010; Chesler, Barabino, Bhatia, & Richards-Kortum, 2010).

Another major area to involve students in is active learning. Active learning is a process by which students interact with the instructor and engage in the learning process instead of simply sitting and robotically listening to lectures. Actively engaging students in learning increases knowledge of the subject above and beyond that of simple instruction (Hebl & King, 2004; Knight, Hebl, & Mendoza, 2004) and can be implemented by incorporating into class time activities such as demonstrations, role-playing, debates, hands-on experiments, and student-led discussions. Active learning gives students the opportunity to apply theory and knowledge to practical examples and helps them to critically analyze information they are given. Active learning also can foster creativity and experimentation (Davis-Lowe, 2006) that can be beneficial for all students, particularly those who may not otherwise be encouraged to explore a particular field.

Provide professional development in diversity and cultural awareness. Educators must be prepared to create and nurture diversity in classrooms. This includes not tolerating discrimination against any students in any form (e.g., teasing, impatience with peers, derogatory jokes) (Davis-Lowe, 2006). Educators also should understand and embrace cultural and other differences students have, incorporate information into the curriculum that is relevant to all students, and use a variety of methods that support different learning styles (Davis-Lowe, 2006). To achieve this goal, teachers should first educate themselves on different cultures and the prominent minority individuals within subfields of learning.

Focus groups are used for a dominant form of qualitative data collection. A Focus group is a moderated conversation that typically involves participants of any age. You can learn about people's attitudes, beliefs, desires, and reactions to concepts. A book titled: "Focus Group as Qualitative Research" by David L. Morgan, explains that, the use of focus groups as a self-contained method can often lead to an emphasis on research design. Focus groups can serve a number of different purposes.

Another method that can be utilized in research are Survey(s). Surveys can be a written document that is completed by the individuals/group that are being surveyed, an online questionnaire, a face-to-face interview, or a telephone interview. In a research titled: "Using Survey Data to Test some Standard Propositions Regarding Exchange Rate Expectations" explains that, when we use survey data and the technique of bootstrapping we are able to reject static or "random walk" expectations for both nominal and real exchange rates.

The Grid-group Cultural Theory uses a model that has two dimensions and each is a measure of sociality. The group dimension describes how strongly people are bonded together. At one end there are distinct and separated individuals, perhaps with common reason to be

together though with less of a sense of unity and connection. The grid dimension describes how different people are in the group and how they take on different roles. At one end of this spectrum people are relatively homogeneous in their abilities, work and activity and can easily interchange roles (Douglas, 1977).

Research that was conducted by the University College London, titled “A History of Grid and Group Cultural Theory” indicated, “The group dimension measures how much of people’s lives is controlled by the group they live in. An individual needs to accept constraints on his/her behavior by the mere fact of belonging to a group” (Douglas, 1977).

Following the literature findings, due to a statistically high graduation rate of Pacific Islanders at Southern Utah University, this research seeks to follow that success. The research includes the Grid-group Cultural Theory to help see whether there is a difference in utilizing perspective cultures in higher education.

The Grid-group cultural theory is a cultural model that was developed by three anthropologists: Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, and Steve Rayner. One of the major reasons that this theory was designed is to show how native rituals/traditions, behavior, and practices were relevant to modern society (Thompson, 1999).

**RQ1:** What is it about Southern Utah University's culture that attracts Pacific Islander students to its campus?

### **Method**

The study present results from a focus group, along with an online survey. This will help me gain a better understanding of perspective culture, and how it affects the important messages of higher education. The main focus is Pacific Islander students in higher education.

The plan was to develop a small focus group of Southern Utah University students formed from the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. The subject could be studied on effective messages that they receive about higher education and its importance. The plan was to develop a focus group as mentioned by David Morgan in the Review of the Literature, to help design an effective focus group of Pacific Islander student attending Southern Utah University.

By observing the Pacific Islander students here at Southern Utah University, one can see that the cultural approach plays a critical part of their self-willingness to continue on with higher education.

According to my literature review, if an online survey was distributed via social media to my colleagues on the National Pacific Islander Student Association Group on Facebook and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, I could get a better range of understanding on ideas and motivation and messages individuals perceive from the importance of higher education. I used Google forms as a resource for distributing surveys.

The surveys ranged from questions of satisfaction to disappointments at SUU, struggles that a student might have in America, how their culture supports or deters from their college experience, etc. The survey was distributed in November of 2016.

Though quantitative research is important, a focus group will reflect a quality source of information that this research may need. The focus group will reflect on similar questions, but will ask for more in-depth responses. This group will provide an idea of why SUU was this student's international education choice. The group came together in February and March of 2017.

### **Results and Discussion**

The biggest problems facing the Pacific Islander community in the United States of

America is the rate of graduation from higher education. The following statement is a disturbing statistic from the U.S. Government open data that states, “Only 1 in 7 Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders has a College Degree or Higher (White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders). The trend is that Pacific Islanders are about half as likely as the general population to hold bachelor's degrees, and even less likely to receive advanced degrees.

Reasoning for this statistic can vary from one idea to the next.

The first hope in regards to this subject/research is to make students aware of Pacific Islanders that are very successful today, due to committing themselves within the boundaries that emphasize the importance of pursuing higher education. Are students willing to take the opportunity that will count as their first credentials to Higher Education?

According to the Granite School District in Salt Lake City, “About 70 percent of Pacific Islander students say they don’t enjoy school, and about the same percentage say the only reason they stay in school is because of their parents. (Pacific Islander High School Dropout Rate Large in Utah, 2003)” These problems really do affect the Pacific Islander students. Granite School District then continues on to say that, “...future changes in secondary education won’t help the cause unless a conscious effort is made to make positive impacts in the lives of students” (Pacific Islander High School Dropout Rate Large in Utah, 2003). Pacific Islander students are approached in their prospective lives with positive influences. The ideological approach to this subject is the cultural methodology viewpoints. After conducting the surveys, “... approaching the Polynesian, Melanesian, and Micronesian students about the importance of higher education is tied directly to their perspective culture(s)”. In a survey performed in Communication 6010 by Tevita Sekeni in November of 2016 found that, out of 200 participants in this descriptive statistic, 75.3 percent agreed that culture is tied directly to higher education for Pacific Islander

students. The other 19.2 percent disagreed that culture is NOT tied directly to higher education for Pacific Islander students and 5.5 percent believed otherwise.

In the survey, 75.3 percent of students asked themselves, “What will benefit my family more, work or college?” According to a focus group done by Tevita Sekeni and Samantha Burfiend, an adequate way to help Pacific Islander students answer this question is to make them aware of Pacific Islanders that are very successful today, due to committing themselves to both the importance and values of Higher Education.

According to statistics on average annual salary, individuals who attend college earn more as a result of their higher levels of education. In fact, college graduates can earn annually over \$17,500 more than a high school graduates (Kurtzleben, 2014). Southern Utah University’s Marketing Communication has found that a person with a high school diploma will make roughly \$35,000 per year (\$1.3 million in a lifetime), while a college graduate will earn on average \$60,000 per year (\$2.4 million in a lifetime). Studies from Southern Utah University explain that individuals who attend college are hired at higher rates and with greater consistency (Wolf, 2014). Individuals without a high school degree are three times as likely to be unemployed than someone with a bachelor’s degree (Kurtzleben, 2014).

Pacific Islander students usually give the monotone excuse that they have a hard time finding and receiving opportunities within their own life. The question that Southern Utah University emphasizes to Pacific Islander students is, “...Are students willing to take the opportunity that will count as their first credentials to Higher Education?” One of the issues in this matter is that students have to want an education in order to succeed. Students do not know that the federal government today makes available over \$150 billion in student financial aid every year in scholarship offers. This is a resource for prospective and current undergraduate



students that are seeking scholarship funding to help pay for school (Federal Student Aid, 2016). The solution to this issue is in defining the importance of higher education for Pacific Islanders and for all students overall. Statistics for the survey states that, 87.7 percent agreed that it is important to define the importance of higher education. It will create a method of becoming a more critical thinker about viewpoints towards their prospective futures. It is very important to approach students with this question: “Is higher education a choice or a must?” Higher education is not a choice or a must; but more of an opportunity. Critical thinking about higher education will lead students to a successful future; the door is wide open take the opportunity and run with it. Southern Utah University puts emphasis to this by saying: “...higher education is an opportunity to break the poverty cycle; they can take their knowledge back and build their perspective government's.” Higher education is certainly not all about the money, but the better understanding of how the world works around us.

Pacific Island cultures can be viewed as family oriented and not based on individualistic principles. For the Pacific Islander students, the decision to continue on with higher education will depend on the wellbeing of their perspective family once they leave. Students will say to themselves, “My family needs my help and it will be better for them if I stay and work, rather than leave for school and have nothing to contribute.” This is the deep culture that is overlooked by those who seek to understand the reason why so many Pacific Islander students do not seek higher education. In order to understand deep culture, people need to utilize Interpersonal Communication. Interpersonal communication is the process by which groups/people exchange information, feelings, and meaning (Interpersonal Communication Skills, 2011).

During the focus groups, the varying PI populations included Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, and Micronesian. These groups all agreed that SUU’s helpful atmosphere and

caring faculty kept the PI student from leaving Southern Utah University. The other issue discussed by the focus group was the funding support for them to start their education. Students generally have a positive thought on the programs, though some felt slightly behind in math and sciences.

Students from larger areas including Hawaii and Fiji had more financial and family support to come to SUU, while students from smaller countries have more financial responsibilities after graduation. All students discussed educational gaps toward their peers, but SUU's Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) gave them an area to study and learn around like-minded individuals.

The surveys showed that a majority of PI students coming to SUU are first generation, with an issue of either community or family support. Though the focus group indicates that support has been established through the CDI and their church organizations.

One large indicator of both survey and focus group is that over-half of the students who participated believed that culturally college is a must, not a want.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, Pacific Islanders are significantly underrepresented in higher education. The biggest problem facing the Pacific Islander community is the rate of high school dropouts. The ideological, theological, and motivational approach to this problem is making Pacific Islander students understand that higher education is the key to emphasizing the cultural approach in solving family matters. I strongly believe that the logic of society predetermines that Pacific Islanders are far less likely to graduate from college than the general population. There is a reason to this, and is definitely not always intentional. The process of fixing this issue is to make students understand the nuances of their culture.

My explanation to this major issue in the Pacific Islander community is that higher education can lead students to a successful future, by giving the proper values/education to develop into a successful contributor to their society. From the results of the surveys and the focus group, SUU offered a positive environment. Cultural motivation will really target Pacific Islander students; leaving students with the mindset of becoming a more critical thinker. Culture is the key point of emphasizing the importance of higher education within Pacific Islander communities. Encouragement of higher education for Pacific Islander is critical to the success of their collective futures. In order to make Pacific Islander students aware of the importance of graduating from college, you must make them understand step-by-step. The process of finding and receiving opportunity. Students are asking themselves: “What will benefit my family more, work or college?”

The Solution: Defining the Importance of Higher Education for Pacific Islanders and for all students overall. Is Higher Education a Choice or a Must?

Visualization and Example: Make students aware of Pacific Islanders that are very successful today due to committing to the Importance/Values of Higher Education.

Call for Action: Are students willing to take the opportunity that will count as their first credentials to Higher Education? Students have to desire an education to succeed.

### **Limitations**

This research had no comparison to any other college/university. This subject focused only on the success SUU has with its PI students. SUU is a smaller university with fewer PI students, so it cannot count as a valid population compared to bigger colleges/universities. It is much harder for PI students to succeed in a larger campus, because the nature of culture related to a larger campus. The reason can vary from one idea to another, but a smaller

college/university has a better student to professor ratio. The reason why this is important is because a smaller campus means a more personalized education.

### **Other-research**

Although this research reflects SUU, the research on PI students could be expanded to other colleges/universities. This research can provide a base for other college/university to find ways to retain PI students in their institution. This could help colleges/universities find cultural messages to retain their PI student to graduation, by understanding the ideological, motivational, and theological approaches.

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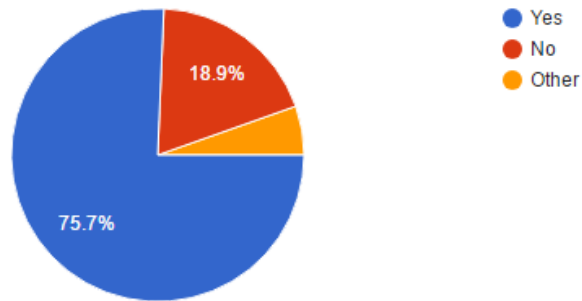
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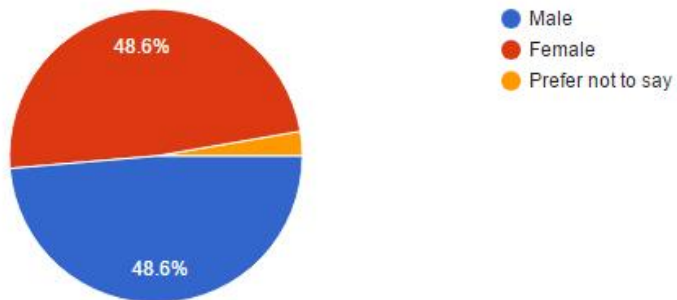
**Appendix**

**DO YOU THINK CULTURE IS TIED DIRECTLY TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS?**

(74 responses)



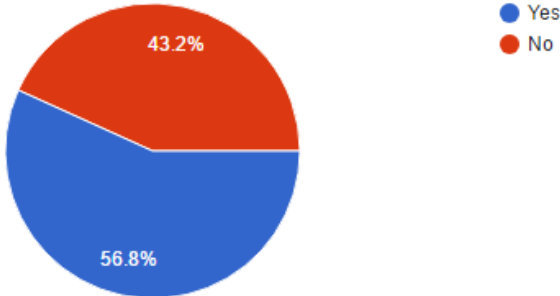
**Your Gender** (74 responses)





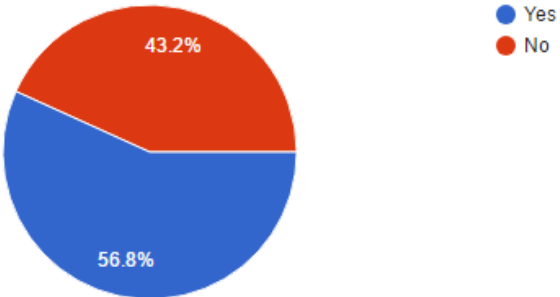
ARE YOU FIRST GENERATION TO ATTEND COLLEGE/UNI IN YOUR FAMILY?

(74 responses)

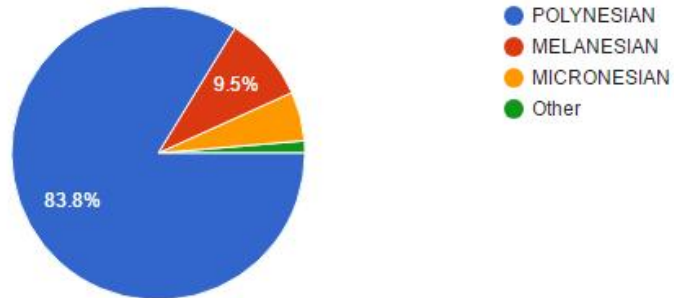


ARE YOU FIRST GENERATION TO ATTEND COLLEGE/UNI IN YOUR FAMILY?

(74 responses)



ARE YOU...? (74 responses)



WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS A PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES?

(74 responses)

**Unemployment**

Because Pacific Islanders are belittled and put into categories such as "Asian-Pacific" that make us disappear. How wē are imagined also disadvantages us and decreases the opportunities wē are given unless wē are comodified.

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## Not unknowing how it works

Structural racism, teachers not equipped to adequately support PI students, school systems that only value Western knowledge systems, little or no pipeline to higher education, stereotypes that negatively impact PIs

Growing up it was never encouraged. I watched my community celebrate high school graduates as if that is the end of their education and disregard college graduates. I was fortunate my parents were opposite. No celebration until we finished college.

As a people, we like other immigrants, do not believe we can succeed like other cultures have. Additionally, we have few role models in our immediate family. The fact that I am 56 years old and second generation is unheard of.

## Lack of finances.

Because they don't have the potential or mind-set for it

## People don't want to put in the time

There is still a misconception that only Pacific Islanders who play football have a chance at moving on to college. More resources should be put toward doing outreach to children and families to show how to prep for college, pay (scholarships/grants/work study) and how attaining a higher education would help the family as a whole.

They think they can't afford it but they are just unaware of the many scholarships and grants available to them that would help pay for their college.

## Lack of funds

We as a people are being misunderstood and we behave in certain ways appropriate to our cultures, but does not help us to thrive in the higher education system created to cater for the Western mindset. We need an environment that can encourage our students to become better and cater to our specific way of thinking.

Lack of understanding of process, financial aid and over comprehension of how to go to college.

## YES

I believe culture plays a role. First, although we are told that education is important, our culture places a number of other things above it. For example, religion is placed above education so when there is a church function it is a must to attend, sometimes even on a school night at the expense of valuable homework/study time. Family is another - a relative (who has traveled a long distance and you haven't seen in years) comes into town and it's likely that a child is allowed to stay home from school for a day or two, or a week. There are a few others, but I believe these are the main two that interfere with our children's education. Don't get me wrong, I love my culture, but we have yet to find a balance between these interests rather than have them competing against each other. I was fortunate enough to have a father who believed in the value of education and found a way to make all of these values work together rather than against each other.

Culture overrides the pursuance of higher education. Traditional roles of a young man, or young woman,

## WHY DO YOU THINK SUU HAS A HIGHER GRADUATION RATE FOR PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS THAN OTHER COLLEGES/UNI?

(74 responses)

The university understands the cultural importance of our people

They probably have a good support team their

There are fewer distractions at SUU and the surrounding area.

Dk

I honestly do not know. I am studying in a different state (Illinois)

They have connections to PI nations and does a great job with the creating spaces for the PI community to flourish in the education community.

More support from educated Polynesians

I do not know much about SUU, but as a Tongan, it is my impression that the State of Utah has a higher percentage of college-educated Tongans than other metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Honolulu. I am not Mormon, but I believe that it the majority of those college-educated Tongans in the State of Utah are most likely of the Mormon faith and from what little I do know of Mormons, they have a good support system. Of course, I could be absolutely wrong, so let's categorize that as my humble opinion.

Where is the data of the assessment of the cultural centers at each higher educational institution? I do believe this needs to be included in this graph to identify possible, as well as the student population, and geographical

data.

Isolation from family asking for support. SUU has a great infrastructure for students to thrive, especially in the health sciences boasting remarkable acceptance rates. I'm a UofU grad, but wish I went to SUU so there's my bias.

I don't know.

I'm not sure. Maybe they promote their college directly to Polynesians.

The community support.

I know for a fact that SUU provides them with options and countless resources.

SUU, looks for those Pacific Islanders in the state in need of an education.

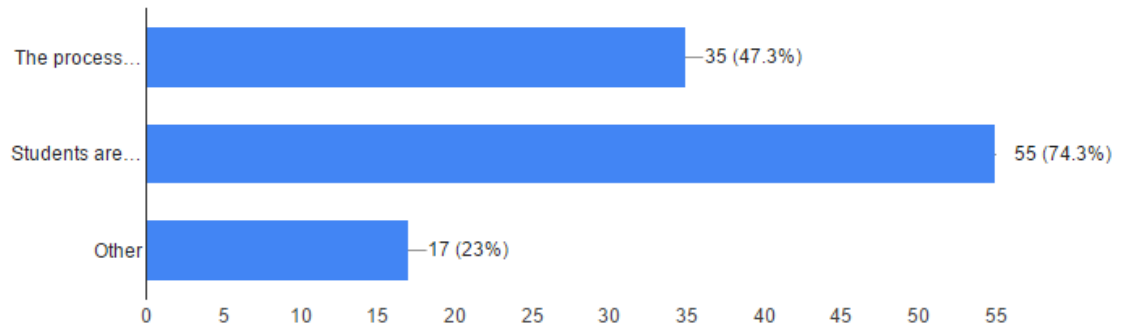
Powerful influence to complete education

Good question. We'd need additional data and/or context to better analyze

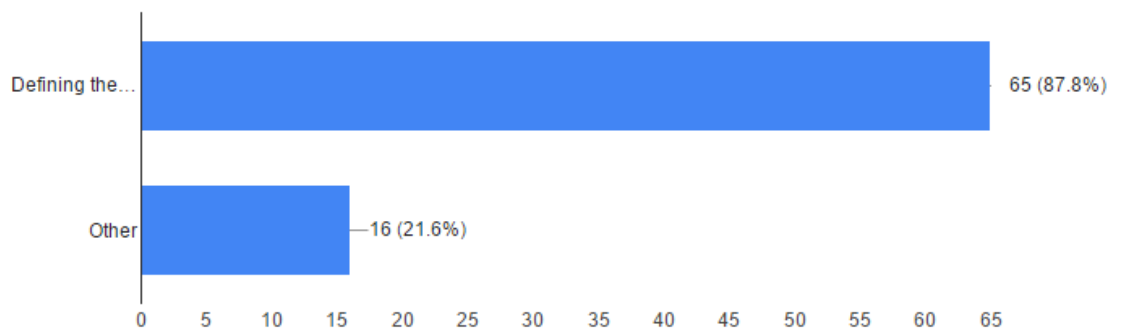
Cheap tuition

When you share a common goal (college graduation) with people who have the same background and struggles as you, you may be more motivated to achieve that goal.

THE PROBLEM? (74 responses)



SOLUTION? (74 responses)



IS HIGHER EDUCATION A CHOICE OR A MUST? (74 responses)

