Research Awards

Ana Tamani

The University of the South Pacific rewarded its best-performing academic staff and students for their high quality research outputs in 2016 at a special Research Awards Evening on 10 November, 2017. Professor Rajesh Chandra, Vice-Chancellor and President of USP congratulated the awardees including staff and students towards research excellence and achievement. He noted that compared to 2015, which recorded quality research outputs with 51 A/A*, 2016 had the highest number of high ranked publications, by far at a total of 110 A*/A, with a total research output of 275. Professor Chandra confirmed that a total of $251,017 was paid out for publications for this year’s event compared to $187,080 which was paid out in the 2016 event.

Awardees of the 6th Research Excellence & Innovation Awards at USP’s Laucala Campus with Mr Shaheen Ali, Fiji’s Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism.
Three (3) USP inventions that received patent certification from the Australian Government and registered under the Australian Patents Act in 2017 were recognized. These were: Braille Slate to Teach Children with Visual Disabilities by Mr Nikhil Singh, Mr Vinaal Prakash, Ms Monika Koroi-Robinson and Dr Utkal Mehta; Aromatic Network for Power Distribution System by Dr F M Rabiul Islam, Dr Kabir Mamun, Mr Krishneel Prakash & Mr Avneel Lallu; and GSM Based Early Flood Warning and Monitoring System by Mr Sheikh Azid, Dr Bibhya Sharma, Mr Reginald Nath, Mr Vikrant Sharma, Mr Abhinendra Chand, Mr Sumeet Prasad and Ms Angele Jacquier.

The Best Research publication under the Vice-Chancellor’s Prizes was received by Professor Maurizio Cirrincione and Dr Jenny Tonsing for their research on Vehicle to Grid System to design a Centre Node Virtual Unified Power Flow Controller, and Intimate Partner Violence in South Asian communities: exploring the notion of ‘shame’ to promote understandings of migrant women’s experiences respectively.

The Best Student Research publication under the Vice-Chancellor’s Prizes was scooped by Shaiza Janif and Gaurav Raicar for their research on the Value of Traditional oral Narratives in Building Climate Change Resilience: Insights from Rural Communities in Fiji and, Improving Protein-Fold Recognition & Structural Class Prediction Accuracies Using Physiochemical Properties of Amino Acids respectively.
The Innovation Award under the Vice-Chancellor's Prizes was scooped by Dr Bibhya Sharma, Swasti Narayan, Afshana Anzeg and Jai Raj for the Science Teachers Accelerated Programme (STAP).

More than 140 staff and students were rewarded for high quality publications (ranked A*, A and B) in the year 2016, with over 160 publication titles being recognised.
DIRECTOR'S NOTE
Professor Jito Vanualailai

We are concluding the year 2017 on a high note as 2016-2017 period has been the most productive in USP’s history in terms of research outputs. Since 1970, USP has produced a total of 2447 research-related documents cited by Scopus of which 395 was published in 2016-2017.

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Documents cited by Scopus between 1970-2017

In 2016 and 2017, the number of publications in the non-sciences almost equaled that of the sciences’ (including computer science, engineering and mathematics), at 50.6% and 49.4%, respectively, of the total output (395). Specifically, 35.4% of the outputs are in the Social Sciences (27.8%), and Arts and Humanities (7.6%). Publications related to Business, Management and Accounting registered 6.8%, and those related to Economics, Econometrics and Finance recorded 8.4%. The rest (49.4%) are in mainly in the Sciences, Engineering and Mathematics.

Documents by subject area as cited by Scopus between 1970-2017
USP Staff present at I-MELT in Adelaide

Shaiza Janif

The University of the South Pacific was represented by six staff members during the International Conference on Models of Engaged Learning and Teaching in Adelaide from the 11th – 13th of December, 2017. The international conference was a meeting place of educators as well as administrators sharing a common conceptualization that engages students and educators in many diverse ways, contexts and cultural settings. The Models of Engaged Learning and Teaching (MELT) which were in focus for this conference were the:

- Research Skill Development (RSD and RSD7),
- Work Skill Development (WSD),
- Clinical Reflective Skills (CRS),
- Critical Thinking Skills (CTS),
- Optimising Problem Solving (OPS) pentagon, and
- Research Mountain (for children).

In his keynote address, Professor Vanualailai [Director Research] explained that the University adopted the RSD framework in 2012 upon the recommendation of the Strategic Total Academic Review [STAR] Working Group 5 as a means of developing and assessing students’ research skills in content-rich courses from First Year undergraduate to PhD level in diverse fields of specialisation to help address the environmental, economic, social and cultural challenges that face the Pacific region.
The RSD Coordinator Ms Janif in her presentation provided an overview of the framework implementation process and associated challenges. In six years since the RSD projects’ commencement at the University, the Research Office has helped facilitate 16 training sessions with a participant headcount of over 500. So far 81 courses at the University are RSD embedded across 25 disciplines. Ms Janif iterated that the University has now changed its focus to programme level implementation for more consistent and progressive research skills development.

The Graduate Assistant Scholarship (GAship) has been revamped and is now the Pacific Scholarship for Excellence in Research and Innovation (PSERI). With the University’s aim to become the research hub in the Pacific, Research Office sponsors 20 per cent of Masters and PhD students at USP every year under the GA scholarship (now PSERI). As a premier postgraduate research scholarship, PSERI will target postgraduate research students with a GPA of 4.0, excelling in their respective fields.

The University Senior Management Team (SMT) has also approved for an increase in living allowances under the PSERI award. The last review of the scholarship package was carried out in 2012 and there have not been any changes since then. The scholarship package will see a considerable increase in the living allowances for scholarship holders with Masters students receiving $21,600 annually and PhD students receiving $24,000 annually.

New intakes for the 2018 PSERI awards will be finalized in mid-January and the change in allowance will come into effect at the beginning of Semester 1, 2018.
Dr Narsamma Lingam has been a teacher for more than two decades; as such her research interests are mostly orientated towards learning and teaching. Prior to joining The University of the South Pacific, she was a secondary school teacher. Her experience and love for teaching geared her towards her core research interest in educational leadership training and development.

Dr Lingam is a recent PhD graduate of USP and completed her thesis on the Research Offices’ PhD Completion Scholarship. While reflecting on her research journey, she shared that it all started when a new policy on teacher retirement was implemented that sent Narsamma Lingam Teaching Assistant FALE

While talking about her research experience Dr Lingam said “my research excites me because it aids the improvement of my own teaching and learning abilities”. Adding that opportunities to travel and meet like-minded people is also quite rewarding.

Even though she is a recent PhD graduate, she is a well published researcher. In fact, Dr Lingam’s Quality of Research [QoR]* for research publications is equivalent to that of a Professor. She sees this as one of her greatest contribution in the area of learning and teaching in the Pacific and hopes to continue research and publications in the field of educational leadership.

*QoR is a University policy which assesses University/staff research outputs based on three key measures: quantity, quality, and impact.

An extended list of Dr Lingam’s publication are available online via the USP Research Repository at http://repository.usp.ac.fj

Interview and write-up: Shaiza Janif
Another aspect of his research is to promote greater adaptability and preparedness for the region. As part of the Fijian delegation to COP23 in Bonn, Singh was part of multiple panel discussions advocating on climate justice and resilience. He hopes to continue contributing to such dialogues after the completion of his thesis.

Singh commenced his Masters in Environmental Science with the University in 2017 under the Research Office’s Graduate Assistant Scholarship. Being a Gold Medal awardee for Environmental Science and Outstanding Bachelor of Science graduate, he was also offered the Outstanding Scholar Award. Singh’s research is in the area of paleoclimatology; more specifically Paleotempestology which is the study of past natural disasters by means of geological proxies as well as historical records. This research is underpinned by the principle that the past is the key to the future.

Through his research, Singh is interested in determining whether something as big as Tropical Cyclone Winston has happened in the past or if we entering an era of even bigger cyclones which is of huge socioeconomic importance for countries like Fiji. He is keen in identifying if such events are part of an existing trend and if so, what are the recurrence intervals of such catastrophic events.

According to Singh, “this study will be the first record of tropical cyclone activity in Fiji over the Holocene, a chronology of events which might help in future cyclone prediction”. Fiji is continuously threatened by cyclones, and the fear that we are not aware of when something as big as TC Winston might hit us is tragic. This study has the potential to be used as a baseline for more research of similar nature in the country and region.

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Singh is very passionate about his research work and believes that “research should always be about you, it should help you find the answers to your greatest doubts, and then only will you be willing to work all night for it; USP provides that space to explore and the best part is, they pay for it”. He continued saying that “through research opportunities, initiatives and incentives, the University paves the road to research excellence”.

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