

Te Whatu Kairangi

Name of nominee: Dr Marcia Leenen-Young

General Award: Achieving Diversity

Word count of nomination: 4499

Koi wai au?

O lo'u i goa o Marcia Leenen-Young

O lo'u tina e sau mai Manu'a ma Salea'aula

O lo'u tama e sau mai Limburg ma le
Netherlands



I am a Senior Lecturer and Pacific historian in Pacific Studies, Te Wānanga o Waipapa|School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies at Waipapa Taumata Rau|University of Auckland. I am applying for a Te Whatu Kairangi General Award under the category of achieving diversity and inclusion for improving outcomes for Pacific learners. My impact as a Pacific educator is significant on Pacific learners because I develop strong connections with my students and focus on working with them to achieve excellence as Pacific peoples. Academic excellence is a priority, but more than that I impact students by challenging them to think beyond their immediate context as a student and encourage them to think about their place as a Pacific person in Aotearoa.

I am Samoan/Pālagi, born in New Zealand to an immigrant mother from Samoa and a first-generation Dutch New Zealander. My story as a Pacific educator is entwined with those who have come before me. My mother's experiences of education in New Zealand demonstrate the failure of a western system of education to cater for those who do not 'fit' the target demographic. She left school at 15 colonised by the conviction that to make it in New Zealand you had to fit in with the dominant culture. My mother's experiences led her to emphasise education as the only way to succeed, and so guided me on my path to being an educator and to my passion for supporting Pacific students to achieve excellence. I carry my mother and my ancestors with me on this journey, to honour the sacrifices they made for me to take this path, and as motivation every day to encourage students who are just like me to achieve success at university.

My teaching philosophy

My teaching philosophy reflects my family background and values, my experiences as a teacher and learner, is informed by my own research and reflection, and shaped by the work of Pacific scholars. In one word, my teaching is *holistic*. I work to recognise and respect our students as people who bring many experiences and influences into the teaching space. I work to decolonise educational spaces in the university and create spaces where the Pacific values of community, service and respect are centred, and where Indigenous Pacific knowledges and the voices of Pacific peoples are not only emphasised but prioritised. I consistently reflect and develop my pedagogical practices to better connect to my students and create an uplifting learning experience.



Talanoa with Pacific Studies' students in the Fale Pasifika

My own experiences as a Pacific learner directly influence my teaching philosophy, especially as I often navigated spaces as the only Pacific person. My experience in Māori and Pacific student support has made me acutely aware of the realities of being a student. My research on Pacific students and learning (Leenen-Young, 2020) shows the learning strengths of Pacific students, even with the difficulties in navigating a western-based learning institution. These findings echo my own experience as a Pacific student

and became a transformative point for me encouraging deeper reflection, increased motivation to be a better teacher, and determination to create mana-enhancing learning environments not only for Pacific students but all students.

As a Pacific academic, I am influenced by the work of Konai Helu Thaman and Teresia Teaiwa. Thaman's (2009) advocacy for Pacific centred curriculum for Pacific peoples has influenced my approach to teaching through recognition of the valuable knowledges our students bring to university. For many of the students in my classes, their traditional forms of knowledge transmission and production are seen as less valuable than knowledge created and taught by the West. In my classes I actively push against this and encourage students to do the same by encouraging

discussion, activity, and reflection as important components of learning as collaborative knowledge building. As a historian, Teaiwa (1996) centralised her Pacific-ness in her conceptualisation of teaching history, particularly through the Pacific concept of history as connected and present. The idea of history as connected, personal, and subjective deeply influences my pedagogical practice as a historian. In this way I centralise Pacific epistemologies and approaches to knowledge, working in a decolonial spirit towards creating a learning environment that caters to the needs of our students. I encourage students to connect with history, emotionally react to it, and build historical analyses that are critical and speak to their own personal worldviews.

Career overview and context: sustained contribution to Pacific learner success

My context is a university setting where I teach Pacific history and Pacific Studies at all levels. I welcome all into my teaching environments, but I centre Pacific ways of knowing, practice Pacific pedagogies, and focus on supporting the success of Pacific students. Pacific students have been a priority group in education in Aotearoa since 2001 with the first *Pasifika Education Plan*, and many national policies in the previous twenty years have aimed at supporting Pacific student success. The *2020 Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities* and the *Tertiary Education Strategy* demonstrate this through the inclusion

of Pacific learners in their objectives and priorities. Despite the multiple policies on Pacific students in tertiary education, universities continue to alienate, isolate, and demotivate Pacific students because they are simply not made for us. My drive as an educator is to shift this experience of university for as many Pacific students as possible.

My career at the University of Auckland has spanned almost two decades and seen my impact on Pacific learner success in multiple ways: as a

I am absolutely delighted that I was able to take your amazing paper. It really challenged a lot of subliminal biases and perspectives which I held and I think helped me grow as a history student but also as a New Zealander... I also wanted to mention the inspiring nature of the assignments we were tasked to undertake, especially the oral history assignment. I really feel like it gave us undergrads the chance to engage in the practice of writing organic histories. To get the opportunity to do this and write about the history of someone I cared about in the last semester of my history degree really was a privilege.

Informal written feedback, PACIFIC 314, 1 July 2021

student mentor, as a pastoral student support advisor, as a learning advisor and designer, and as a teacher.

As a Pacific postgraduate student in Ancient History, I struggled with isolation. Through this, I realised that I wanted to contribute to changing the unwelcoming academic environments I had struggled through. This led me to lobbying the Classics and Ancient History Department in 2002 to establish a position of Māori and Pacific mentor to support undergraduate students, which then merged with the Tuākana programme in the Faculty of Arts. This passion to support Pacific learner success began as a postgraduate student working part-time in the Tuākana programme, where I advised on student engagement, Pacific pedagogies, and mentor training.



Samoan Siva workshop, MĀORIHTH 28H Cultural Wānanga, semester 2 2016

In 2016 I was offered a Professional Teaching Fellow (PTF) position in the Certificate of Health Sciences, MĀORIHTH 28H: Academic and Professional Development in Māori and Pacific Health 2, where I added my pedagogical expertise to a practical course that exposed students to key components of Māori and Pacific culture. For many students, this was the first time they had practically engaged with cultural practices, including their own. Being able to connect to their cultural heritage, some for the first time, had an incredible impact on the students.

In 2017, I was offered a PTF position as the Communications and Capability Specialist in Teaching and Learning at the Business School. While this was not focused exclusively on Pacific learners, I contributed to the development of online academic programmes, such as the proposed Masters of

Māori and Indigenous Business Programme, supported the development of the online Learning Hub, and led academic initiatives with the Tuākana programme.

In 2018 my expertise in curriculum design and Pacific learners led to an invitation to join Pacific Studies as a PTF. Consequently in 2019, I became a Lecturer, achieving Senior Lecturer in 2021. Since joining Pacific Studies I have taught courses at all levels: HISTORY 104, PACIFIC 205/305, PACIFIC 214/314, PACIFIC 304, PACIFIC 709, PACIFIC 714, and PACIFIC 781. These courses have ranged from postgraduate classes of 4 to stage one classes as large as 143 students. I created three courses (PACIFIC 205/305, PACIFIC 214/314, PACIFIC 709), redesigned two courses (HISTORY 104, PACIFIC 714), and restructured PACIFIC 304 in 2020 into an online format.

I have carried out research and published on Pacific students and learning, contributing to scholarship on Pacific student success. Recently, my reputation as a teacher who enables Pacific student success has been recognised through invitations to publish in international journals and lead publications on Pacific pedagogies. I have been invited to present at conferences on pedagogy and Pacific students within a university setting. These invitations reflect my pursuit of teaching excellence through reflexive pedagogical practices and research. I am also the recipient of the 2021 Faculty of Arts Leadership in Teaching and Learning Award, which is a significant achievement



Graduation May 2022 where I received an Early Career Excellence in Teaching Awards with Hollyanna Ainea, MA supervisee, who wrote and read the award citation.

Often we are taught to uphold the importance of holistic wellbeing and interconnectedness in Pacific culture, and I can confidently say that Marcia fully embodies these Pacific values. Her delivery, creativity and critical engagement with students promote safe learning environments and I have noticed that students feel less ashamed about asking for support during difficult times.

During lockdown, Marcia consistently ensured that students were never isolated in their studies. Marcia facilitated late-night study zoom sessions for staff and postgraduate students, ran postgraduate workshops and meetings, and organised writing retreats for Pacific Studies. As a postgraduate student, I am incredibly grateful for Marcia and her willingness to safeguard students' learning, which boosted my confidence to achieve my goals.

Formal reference: Hollyanna Ainea, MA supervisee and GTA for HISTORY 104 (2020-22)

considering that I am still an early career academic and applied in this category. Also in 2021, I received a University of Auckland Early Career Excellence in Teaching Awards; a category that was particularly competitive according to the judging panel.

Teaching approach and impact

There are four central approaches I have as an educator that illustrate the approach and impact of my teaching: the centring of Pacific knowledges; student centred and communal; innovative and creative; and, empathetic, relational and mana-enhancing.

1. The centring of Pacific knowledges

As a Pacific teacher I centre Pacific ways of knowing and being in the learning and teaching spaces I inhabit, particularly through curriculum design and new course development:

- *MAORIH28H: Academic and Professional Development in Māori and Pacific Health 2* focused on exposure to various Pacific and Māori cultural traditions in a safe and nurturing environment.
- *PACIFIC 205/305: Pacific Innovation and Sustainability* looked at traditional Indigenous Pacific sustainability practices alongside contemporary Pacific efforts to counter issues such as climate change, ocean management, pollution, and food security.

- *PACIFIC 304: Advanced Pacific Studies* and *PACIFIC 714: Pacific Research Methodologies and Practice* centred Pacific research values and ethics to support developing Pacific researchers.
- *HISTORY 104: Pacific History an introduction* and *PACIFIC 214/314: Pacific History: New Zealand in the Pacific from 1900* centres Pacific ways of telling history through profiling chants, oral histories, songs, genealogies, and material culture as historical artifacts, teaching students to approach them with as much reverence as they would written historical resources.

The impact of centring Pacific knowledges on Pacific learners is significant in that they see themselves, their ancestors, and their cultural knowledges as valid within the framework of a Western education. I have often had students comment on stories I tell in class that resonate with what they have learnt from their elders, or how it has motivated them to listen and place more value on the oral histories passed down to them. Validation of this ancestral knowledge impacts students by promoting investment and value in what they are learning and supports retention because they are more connected to the content and learning environment, which in turn promotes positive academic outcomes. The impact of this also reaches beyond the university, as it supports the development of Pacific peoples who contribute positively to their own communities and understand the importance of Pacific knowledges.

2. Student focused and communal

Student centred learning pedagogies align with Pacific learning approaches in that they view the teacher and the learner in a two-way relationship. As a Pacific teacher I intentionally prioritise creating a Pacific-focused learning environment that emphasises community and collaboration. A Pacific learning environment is one that allows for knowledge building collaboratively through discussion in an environment that centres Pacific values of reciprocity, respect, and community.

I foster collaboration in large lectures through online tools such as Mentimeter or Padlet, creating a cohort feel within the class through open discussion. I do this through building space in the curriculum for collaborative knowledge building. A significant part of fostering this collaborative space in PACIFIC 214/314 (110 students) was through the inclusion of four workshops



PACIFIC 214/314 at Auckland Museum with select Pacific archives, semester 1, 2021

within the lecture schedule on knowledge building through the analysis of Pacific and non-Pacific primary sources. Two of these workshops were held in the Fale Pasifika, a Pacific learning

Marcia is a deeply talented, rare, and special kind of teacher. She is able to form connections with students in ways that I have never seen other lecturers and you can tell she genuinely cares about the success of every single student. Her eloquence and care for us were so encouraging and made us, as a cohort, stay encouraged and on top of things.

PACIFIC 304, OLE course report, semester 2 2021

environment, where students read/listened to/watched and analysed primary sources collectively, sharing their knowledges with their peers. This had a significant impact on relationship building and knowledge validation, especially for the Pacific students who could speak to cultural nuances and language (the original Pacific language was always provided with English translation). I was included in this communal knowledge building and learnt from the students in these sessions, creating a space where teaching and learning is shared by both the student and teacher. The impact of my student-centred, communal approach is that students are engaged in my courses and excited to experience learning and pedagogy that is not standard in a university setting. Students also start connecting their learning beyond the classroom, which has impact on them after the completion of their studies. Supporting students to collaboratively learn promotes engagement with the course and develops key skills in collaboration and learning that will have life-long impact.

Marcia would know when she was losing the focus of students and adapt by setting activities to refocus the class. You could really tell that she cared about you doing well.

*HISTORY 104, OLE course report,
semester 2 2021*

Another example of the student centred, collaborative nature of my pedagogy is in PACIFIC 304 where students co-design the curriculum in the final weeks of the semester. This course is an ethics-approved undergraduate research course where I guide students through designing and conducting independent research projects. Allowing students to select the content and direction of the course has an incredible impact in that they take leadership in their own learning and decide, through communal discussion, on their learning priorities. This impacts student engagement and confidence

in decision-making, directly leading to positive course outcomes and encouraging transition to postgraduate studies.

3. Innovative and creative

There are several ways I innovate with course delivery, including the creation of learning opportunities outside the lecture theatre to enhance student experience. This can be seen in PACIFIC 214/314 in the four workshop-based active lectures where we took a virtual tour of colonial monuments on campus, visited the Auckland War Memorial Museum to search for stories of Pacific peoples in WWII, and analysed Indigenous Pacific primary sources in the Fale Pasifika. A particular highlight was the dynamic multi-stop exploration of the museum that included viewing behind the scenes archival documents, discussions of representation within the Hall of Memories, and assessment of the current WWII display for Pacific contributions held in collaboration with the Pacific Curators at the museum. In the reflection at the end of this workshop several students, both Pacific and non-Pacific, were emotionally moved by the absences they recognised in the national memorialisation of war in New Zealand. Innovative spaces for learning in the community have a large impact on students, and this learning experience directly impacted achievement outcomes in this course, with investment and engagement increasing noticeably.



Visit to Auckland Museum, PACIFIC 214/314, semester 1, 2021

I am passionate about encouraging students to think about knowledge presentation beyond the written word and frequently challenge students to submit assessments in oral, written, visual, and digital mediums. In HISTORY 104, students can present their research as a video, podcast, academic poster, or website. I seek to provide these opportunities for students to practice history in a more traditional Pacific way through oral methods of historical transmission. Supporting students to develop skill in disseminating information in more than just a written format not only provides opportunity for innovation but also allows the use of wider conceptions of learning and knowledge transmission that serves our students as graduates. Students are always positive about the challenges presented through these innovations in course delivery and assessment. Encouraging students to think beyond the written word supports shifts in thinking about knowledge production, which impacts the way they think about the nature of knowledge. This is significant in producing learners who can think independently and creatively, which impacts graduate capabilities and employment opportunity. Opportunities to produce knowledge reminiscent of traditional Pacific ways of knowing also empowers Pacific students as Pacific peoples, which has impact on how they engage with and contribute to our Pacific communities in Aotearoa.

4. Empathetic, relational and mana enhancing

A key component of my pedagogical approach is working to uplift and strengthen the mana of the students I interact with by practicing empathy and developing connections. When beginning a new course, the first thing I do is share who I am as a Pacific person by introducing my ancestral connections to the Pacific and explaining who my family are. I share pictures of my family and what is important to me to help them make connections through commonalities.

It's a rare event where you have a lecturer who goes out of their way to follow up with students. I happen to be one of those people & I appreciate what she does.

*HISTORY 104, SET evaluation,
semester 2 2019*

I have found your constant support and guidance during tutorials and outside of the course life-changing and has inspired me. Your empathy, attention, humour, time, and your amazing teaching skills are greatly appreciated.

*Informal written feedback, PACIFIC 314,
6 July 2021*

Making a clear positionality statement is an important way that I connect to students and help them understand that who I am impacts my pedagogy and perspective. I do this consciously in my Pacific History courses to show that my interpretations of history are subjective and dependent on my positionality, which is a key determinant of my historical storytelling and decolonial stance. Frequently, the impact of this on students is significant because they can connect to me as a person. This allows students to have a clear expectation of me and creates a comfortable and safe learning space where the connection between me and the students enhances their investment in learning, leading to consistently high achievement outcomes.

Practicing empathy is also an important part of who I am as a teacher. It is important that my interactions with students focus on wellbeing, offering support, and are framed to enhance mana. Reaching out to students personally in a supportive and empathetic way when they miss an assessment or classes creates a space for students to comfortably seek help if needed. This does not catch every student, but it does show many that I am invested in their success. The impact of



Postgraduate Pacific Studies Writing Retreat, 2021

showing students that I am invested in them and want to see them succeed is incredible. Many Pacific students have been through a school system that failed to encourage or support them as Pacific peoples, so demonstrating support and building relationships has a large impact on their determination to push beyond barriers to achieve successful academic outcomes. The impact of showing Pacific learners that you believe in their potential is beyond measure with benefits that resonate to family and community.

Formal evaluations

My formal Summative Evaluation Tool (SET) evaluations are consistently high for both the quality of the course and teaching. Between 2018 and 2021, the course scores (in-person) range from 4.36 to 5.00 and the teaching scores range from 4.71 to 5.00. The average course score is 4.66 and the average teaching score is 4.87.

Year	Course	Response ratio	Enrolments	Quality of the course	Quality of the Teaching
2018	PACIFIC 781	63.6%	11	4.86	5.00
2019	PACIFIC 205	43.4%	30	5.00	5.00
	PACIFIC 305	44%	25	4.36	4.82
	HISTORY 104	53.6%	125	4.67	4.75
2020	HISTORY 104	36.1%	147	4.63	4.87
	Online			4.00	-
	PACIFIC 304	54.5%	11	4.83	4.83
2021	PACIFIC 214	36.7%	60	4.81	4.95
	PACIFIC 314	32.7%	52	4.82	4.71
	HISTORY 104	23.6%	110	4.62*	-
	PACIFIC 304	50%	14	5.00*	-

*Due to COVID-19 lockdowns there were no questions on teacher performance * refers to the overall satisfaction with the learning experience.*

Leadership, partnership, and collaboration

I demonstrate leadership through my Pacific and student-centred focus on learning and teaching, innovation in shifting the way Pacific History is taught, and my focus on developing communal learning environments. One way this can be demonstrated is through my coordination of the postgraduate support programme in Pacific Studies (2018-2022). Building relationships to establish a strong cohort of postgraduate students has contributed to the establishment of a family-like, supportive, collective environment that is attracting increasing numbers of postgraduate students (enrolments in postgraduate sub-PhD programmes in Pacific Studies have increased by 74% since 2018). I frequently facilitate opportunities for our postgraduate students to gather through study nights, writing retreats, and cohort building events. I personally work to build strong relationships

with our postgraduate students, which is significant because it encourages communication, responsibility, and community, which supports successful academic outcomes and contributes to skill capacity in employment after degree completion.

I am proactive in my development as a teacher through my continued research on Pacific pedagogies and Pacific students. I have collaborated with Pacific colleagues on pedagogical articles in two international peer-reviewed journals and have led a team of Pacific early career researchers in reflecting on their pedagogy as decolonial practice (Thomsen et al. 2021, Leenen-Young et al. 2021).

Marcia is thoughtful about her approach... she has been working toward Pacific-centred curriculum and teaching, embedding Pacific values, ways of knowing, and world views into courses.



Marcia's approach has impact. In 2021 we were invited to an MA graduation party where Marcia spoke as a supervisor and was honoured as significant to the student's success. It was a beautiful event, and it struck me how valued it was by the whole community; it was a shared achievement. The support and supervision Marcia gave was crucial to the student's success in Pacific Studies, and in turn, it had a ripple effect on her community. Marcia's investment of time and energy, her care, and values-led supervision meant a graduation that otherwise would not have happened.

Formal reference: Dr Lisa Uperesa, Acting Head of Pacific Studies

Due to my pedagogy expertise, I was also invited to join the Pacific Specialist group for the current Curriculum Framework Transformation at the University of Auckland, which has potential to impact widely the way university educators engage with their Pacific learners.

My teaching is research-informed through my disciplinary and pedagogical research. My publication on how Pacific students learn argues for shifting focus from a Western pedagogical framework in universities to one that better reflects the current context of Aotearoa (Leenen-Young, 2020). I work constantly to develop my skills as a teacher, build research-proven environments that support Pacific student success, and publish on my practice and research to contribute to wider discussions on Pacific educational achievement.

Since our establishment in 2021, Marcia has been an enormous support for our association. Marcia is not only VA'A's staff advisor, but she is also a treasured and well-respected leader of our community. Marcia sees incredible value in Pacific success and has helped elevate student engagement by mentoring our members and securing funding for VA'A events. Her vision of Pacific success encourages innovation and creativity in scholarship.

Formal reference: VA'A: Village Arts Association Executive Committee

Sustainability

I am creating a pipeline from first year to postgrad where students can study Pacific history with a Pacific person in a way that centres Pacific values. This will directly inform how Pacific history is taught in Aotearoa with the restructure of the NCEA history curriculum and the inclusion of Pacific Studies as a new NCEA subject. The impact of my work is sustainable in that I am working to change the way emerging Pacific historians are thinking and practicing history through centring Pacific ways of telling history and Pacific voices.

A national award could further progress this aim by expanding our collection and access to traditional Pacific ways of telling history, such as oral histories, songs, material cultures and tatau. This will promote awareness and foster collection of resources for us to use in teaching, both in the original Pacific language and English. This would enable us to continue to provide opportunities for Pacific students of history to learn their history through traditional Indigenous Pacific methods.

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