EMERGING LEADERS

FOR THE DIGITAL WORLD

EXTRACT

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Shareeni Kala from Fiji makes the link between Internet governance and e-learning

I work for Fiji National University (FNU) as a lecturer in Computing and Information Systems. I have over ten years of experience as a teacher and am the mother of three beautiful children. I have pursued my career focusing on the information systems field and have received my Master's degree in this area.

Juggling home and work

Being a working mother is very challenging. I had to continue my education after getting married. My husband is also working in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector and is very understanding. He was able to share his knowledge and skills with me. This gave me inspiration and motivation. With the help of my family, I managed to complete my Master's in Information Systems and my Diploma in Tertiary Teaching. Working as a lecturer and being Head of Department with the very capable and kind

staff at the university is also very valuable and encouraging.

The department has 22 lecturers and tutors who all come together to create new knowledge. I teach Certificate IV level courses in Information Systems at Diploma and Bachelor degree level. FNU is around 18 months old. It serves the majority of the national youth and education sector for tertiary qualification.

I enjoy teaching students from certificate to degree levels. They are either secondary school graduates or mature students. The challenge is how to work in the classroom environment, motivating different kinds of students and making them learn. The class sizes vary:
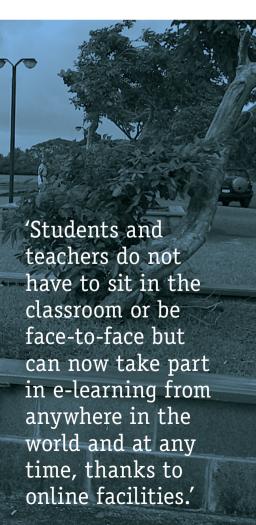
sometimes I have large classes of 150–200 students, and other times I have small to medium-sized classes of 25–40 students. I also teach in the trimester mode, which means 15-week semesters, three times a year.

Recently, I have been engaged in developing the curriculum for the Bachelor's programme. I had to consult with the local industry and an Industry Advisory Committee was set up. This Committee looked into the approval of the syllabus we developed in the department. This was a successful exercise

with help from an overseas graduate staff member who joined the department for a short time. Approval was given by the university senate.

The emergence of Internet governance in Fiji

Fiji is a Pacific island with a little over 800 000 people. I am an Indo Fijian, born and bred in Fiji, and went to primary school, secondary school, and received tertiary education in the central eastern part of the country, in Suva, the capital of Fiji. Fiji is a tropical country with costal

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islands and is heavily dependent on the tourism industry as its main source of income.

Fiji trains and produces qualified graduates in science, medicine, agriculture, commerce, and ICT. There are two universities in Fiji, the University of the South Pacific (USP) and FNU. USP caters not only to Fijians but to the regional countries of the Pacific Islands as well. For the local people of Fiji, FNU was recently erected as an affordable and quality education provider.

Both universities produce ICT experts, who work in the private and public sectors and in universities. Internet governance (IG) is an emerging area within telecommunication, the judiciary, trade, commerce, and academia. In the last two years, the telecommunications sector has gone through

major reforms. The regulated framework has given greater flexibility to and placed greater importance on Internet access, cost, and bandwidth. Legislation in the countries Crime Decree now includes cyber protection and covers privacy issues.

IG and Diplo

In 2010, IG training from DipoFoundation reached not just Fiji but generated awareness through the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat in Fiji. Other Pacific Island countries were also trained in the importance of IG issues. It is a challenge to have capacity-building workshops and to train policymakers in the area of IG; Fiji is no exception. The Information Ministry and stakeholders are working together to develop awareness and create better IG in the region.

Although I worked as an ICT academic, I never directly used IG as the focus of my teaching. I began to understand IG better when I joined the Internet Society Forum with the Pacific Islands Chapter of the Internet Society (PICISOC). The IG 2010 call for the Capacity Building Programme through scholarship made it all possible for me. The essence of IG only became clear to me when the theory was covered and discussions facilitated by the e-learning medium.

I successfully completed up to the research portion of the ICT Strategies online course. I managed to write a proposal for FNU to test the e-learning system. I was able to find out about and elaborate on the requirements of obtaining e-learning for the university. My paper emphasised the advancement of learning

technology. Students and teachers do not have to sit in the classroom or be face-to-face but can now take part in e-learning from anywhere in the world and at any time, thanks to online facilities.

The literature review in my paper covers similar attempts to establish e-learning in nearby, developed countries, like New Zealand. E-learning as an IG issue is becoming widespread, technologically tested, and refined to suit targeted audiences. For FNU, it is vital that a curriculum for identified e-learning courses is developed. Online learning theory and practical assessment needs to be tested. The next step is to secure the technological infrastructure for e-learning.

Discovering new meaning in learning

E-Learning is important to me, and DiploFoundation has been an important supporter of e-learning. I encourage others in the field of ICT and the Internet to go through the programmes. I have discovered new meaning in learning by doing this research and hope that when others are given the opportunity, they will take heed of my success story.

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