

AAUTY VIDEO SERIES:

2021 TEACHER OF THE YEAR:

PROFESSOR KATERINA TEAIWA

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Ni sa bula Vinaka.

I'm Katerina Teaiwa, a Professor in Pacific Studies in the School of culture, history and language, in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. I've been teaching and tutoring for over 20 years, since the first year of my PhD in 1999, when I sought out opportunities to contribute to higher education at the ANU and obtained a teaching certificate from our Center for Teaching and Learning.

Earlier this year, I was recognised as the Australian University Teacher of the Year by the Australian Awards for University Teaching in Universities Australia. Receiving this wonderful recognition, after two challenging years of teaching in a pandemic, moving from face to face and field schools to online learning, and balancing all of this from home while home-schooling my children, was wonderful and overwhelming at the same time.

HOW HAS THIS AWARD IMPACTED YOUR CAREER?

In the kind of work that I do at the ANU, I represent not just myself and the interdisciplinary field Pacific Studies engaging thousands of islands spread across one-third of the whole planet. But what I do reflects on many other Pacific communities. I was born and raised in Fiji, of Banaba, and that is I-Kiribati and African American heritage. And this year, I became the first indigenous Pacific scholar and first Pacific woman to be promoted to professor at the Australian National University. So because I am indigenous to the Pacific, any achievements in the academic context, inspire pride and recognition in many others, both at home and in the Australian and other diasporas with all these connections I'm always trying to balance many spheres of care and commitment in a multiscale away from the personal to the family, my school in college, my university and communities across Australia, Fiji, Kiribati Aotearoa and New Zealand Micronesia Oceania, the USA and beyond.

WHAT IS YOUR TEACHING FOCUS? HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?

In the Pacific Studies courses I delivered the ANU, I have given students opportunities to connect with Pacific Studies partners and networks across the region to experience critical, engaged, creative and indigenous Pacific centered teaching and learning. I insist on cross cultural collaborations to foster students understanding resilience and leadership capabilities, ensuring they have a unique and meaningful experience. Students are encouraged to embark on a metaphorical voyaging. Canoe to gain a sense of the Pacific's vast and diverse social, political and cultural dimensions where no one gets left behind. Through my interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and holistic methods, I've encouraged students to explore Pacific histories, colonialism, activism, regionalism, politics, arts, media and environments with an understanding of how each facet contributes to Pacific and Australian identities, pasts, presents and futures.

HOW DID YOU APPROACH TEACHING AWARDS APPLICATIONS?

Since 2008, I've worked with many colleagues across various schools and colleges to found and build the ANU Pacific Studies major, minor and degree. This is the first degree in Pacific Studies in Australia, and we now have a graduate diploma in engaging the Pacific as well. I also convened the innovative Pacific islands field school that has travelled to Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Hawaii and Palau. And During the pandemic, I began convening the College of Asia and the Pacific students running international hybrid event, Asia Pacific week. In these courses, I used diverse and engaging approaches activities and platforms, including social media. Throughout my courses, I try to inspire other teachers, policymakers, journalists, and our students to appreciate the knowledges, depths and strengths of Pacific peoples and islands that represent some of the most resilient and vulnerable areas of the world.

My contributions to teaching, learning and outreach have been recognized through ANU Outreach Excellence Awards, the New South Wales Council of Pacific Communities Outreach and Education Award, the College of Asian Pacific's 2019 Teaching Excellence Award and the New South Wales Pacific women's professional and business network, educator 2020 award and this national award as well.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE APPLICATIONS?

What would I say to future Australian Teaching Award applicants: Teaching isn't always valued in academia or in particular disciplines. The spotlight is often on our wonderful researchers. And yet, teaching has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my career as a scholar, I would say not to undervalue the incredible opportunity to positively transform minds and hearts through your teaching. This is what I constantly aim for in my classes. We are all on journeys of learning through life, pandemics, climate change, and our institutions. And even when blown off course, we can appreciate the opportunities to find meaning and a sense of purpose along the way.

Vinaka vakalevu

AAUT CONTACT DETAILS

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For any further questions, please contact the Awards Team aaut@rmit.edu.au