

## How Can Course Advising Better Support Pacific Student Success?

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### Abstract

*Previous research has explored the importance of effective course advising to academic success. Course advising that is student-focused and takes a “whole-of-student” approach has been found to be especially important for students that have historically been minoritised in tertiary education. This includes students who are Indigenous, first-in-family, or from low socio-economic backgrounds. However, no research, to our knowledge, has investigated how Pacific students and staff envision course advising. Given Pacific students are among the fastest growing academic cohort in New Zealand and Australia, it is important for universities to understand how to foster Pacific student success. This research involved a series of talanoa (conversations) with both Pacific students and staff to better understand the current role of course advising in student decision-making, future hopes for the development of course advising, and suggestions to improve Pacific support in course advice. Understanding the perspective of Pacific students and staff helps to highlight the current gaps in course advising systems and encourages universities to acknowledge the importance of relationship building, the development of cultural competencies, and increasing Pacific representation in the course advising process. Results support reassessing course advising systems to help improve retention rates of Pacific students.*

### Keywords

Pacific students, Course advising, Collectivism, Community engagement, Pacific success

### Introduction

In recent years, there has been a push to increase the diversity of students engaged in higher education in New Zealand, so that a wider sector of the New Zealand population can avail themselves of the multitude of benefits from a university experience (Ministry of Education, 2020a). Although the previous focus of higher education has been on removing the barriers to access, it has become clear that access alone is not the sole prerequisite for success. It is now well established that students’ success and enjoyment of university is not solely linked to their academic experience, but also to a range of “non-academic” experiences, including their social, mental, and physical wellbeing (Brayboy et al., 2015; Mann, 2020). In response to this more holistic view of the factors that influence student success in tertiary education, universities are exploring the role of the “student experience” in success at university. Student experience can improve through addressing the academic needs of students, in addition to acknowledging their cognitive, social, and emotional needs (De Silva & Garnaut, 2011; Tinto, 2017).

Effective course advising is one area of experience that has now been highlighted as a key determinant of student success (Kift, 2015). Course advising appeared in the university context after concern regarding student academic decision-making (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2010) and it is now well established that effective course advising is key for first-year students (Kift, 2015) and for students who are deemed to be at risk of attrition or poor academic performance (Cox & Naylor, 2018). Two key frameworks have been developed to provide a conceptual basis for understanding the advising process. First, Crookston (1972) developed the Developmental Advising Model which

emphasises the holistic development of students and their transition through different stages of academic life. Crookston identified three primary goals of developmental advising: helping students gain a better understanding of themselves, assisting students in acquiring decision-making skills, and supporting students in setting and achieving their educational and career goals. The model emphasised the role of advisors as facilitators, guiding students through self-reflection, goal setting, and the exploration of educational opportunities. Furthermore, Crookston emphasised the significance of the advisor–student relationship in developmental advising, including building trust, rapport, and open communication channels. Advisors are encouraged to create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable discussing their concerns, aspirations, and challenges.

Secondly, the Social Constructivist Perspective (Creamer, 2000) is an approach that emphasises the importance of collaborative and interactive advising relationships. Creamer argued that advising should go beyond providing information and guidance to actively involving students in the decision-making process, and facilitating students' academic and personal growth. In this model, advisors are seen as guides who empower students to take ownership of their educational journey. This approach encourages students to actively engage in exploring their academic options, understanding programme requirements, and making informed decisions. Advising is not limited to course selection but extends to broader aspects of students' development, including helping students reflect on their interests, values, and strengths, enabling them to align their course choices with their personal and career goals. Finally, advisors play a crucial role in assisting students in identifying and accessing campus resources, addressing academic challenges, and navigating the academic system.

These theoretical frameworks emphasise the importance of developing relationships, and the holistic nature of advising. However, many universities are limited in the course advising they can provide, due to resource constraints (Kift et al., 2010). Many students may only see an advisor once and most universities systems do not allow for a client management approach that would allow students to be assigned to a single advisor throughout their university experience (Kift et al., 2010) which would facilitate the development of an advising relationship. Considering these challenges, researchers have also explored the variety of ways that universities provide course advising. Pardy (2016) identified four key approaches to advising, *Prescriptive Advising* (information-based advising on the mechanics of the degree), *Developmental Advising* (an ongoing process that focuses on personal growth and development in the advisee), and *Proactive Advising* (usually in the form of programmes or events where the advisors reach out to the students to provide information they feel is needed). The final approach to advising is *Appreciative Advising*. This approach involves aspects of both Developmental and Proactive Advising and requires understanding the student's unique experience and co-planning their academic journey. Once a shared understanding is established, both student and advisor work together to provide pathways to meet goals.

Research has demonstrated that Appreciative Advising provides particularly positive outcomes for non-white, Indigenous, and first-in-family students (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2021). This is not surprising, given cultural values and expectations play a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward academic decision-making and advising processes (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986). Furthermore, the quality of the advisor–student relationship and effective communication have been frequently identified as critical factors in successful course advising. Drake et al. (2013) highlighted the significance of interpersonal rapport and trust in advising interactions. Students who perceive their advisors as accessible, supportive, and knowledgeable are more likely to engage in effective course planning, especially first-year students (Kift, 2015) and students who are deemed at risk of attrition or poor academic performance (Cox & Naylor, 2018). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the advisor–student relationship can differ depending on the cultural competency of the advisor, and their ability to understand the unique perspective of the student (Roscoe, 2015).

The culture and systems of many universities are built on an underlying premise of individualistic values that emphasise personal autonomy, independence, and individual goals (Guiffrida et al., 2012). However, individualism is not a universal value. Research has found that Pacific cultures are highly collective and prioritise group harmony, interdependence, and communal goals, especially with family and friends (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011). Furthermore, research suggests that individuals from individualistic cultures may prefer more autonomy and control in their course selection process, valuing personal choice and self-expression. On the other hand, individuals from collectivist cultures may prioritise family and community expectations and seek guidance from trusted authorities, such as parents, elders, or advisors (Zhang, 2016). Collectivist cultures often prioritise respectful and hierarchical relationships, where advisors are seen as authority figures and students may be more deferential in their interactions. Conversely, individualistic cultures may value more egalitarian relationships, where advisors and students engage in open and collaborative discussions. Furthermore, individualistic cultures may prioritise direct, assertive communication and appreciate advisors who provide concise information and guidance (Yeh & Inose, 2003). On the other hand, collectivist cultures may value indirect communication and a supportive, nurturing advising approach that considers their broader personal and social contexts (Schell, 2022).

Appreciative advising has the potential to consider the student's cultural background, but it does pose challenges in terms of time, financial, and personnel constraints (Miller et al., 2019). However, it is important to consider which students are impacted when effective course advising is not available. Lee (2018) found that high-quality advising was especially positive for Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and low-income students, even more so in predominately white institutions. However, no research, to our knowledge, has assessed the specific needs of Pacific students in terms of course advising, despite Pacific students representing the fastest growing student cohort in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). In New Zealand, the term "Pacific peoples" is used to describe a diverse group of individuals who have ancestry from the Pacific Islands, including (but not limited to) Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands. Pacific peoples have been migrating to New Zealand since the 1950s, with many individuals now being New Zealand-born. Using a homogenous term for a diverse range of communities can cause its own challenges; however, the New Zealand government has recognised the importance of developing specific policies to address and benefit the educational needs and aspirations of Pacific students. The Pacific Education Action Plan 2020-2030 (Ministry of Education, 2020b) aims to address persistent disparities and improve educational outcomes for Pacific learners. The plan focuses on five key shifts required to meet the education objects. These shifts include: working with families to identify unmet needs in the wake of COVID-19, confronting systemic challenges that currently limit Pacific students and families, enabling educators to provide a culturally responsive learning opportunity, effective support for Pacific learners to meet their employment goals, and retaining Pacific educators.

The impetus for change is especially important given the current achievement gap between Pacific and non-Pacific students, indicating that the university system, in its current iteration, is not providing equitable services to Pacific students. Tertiary Education Commission data on bachelor's degree six-year completion rates show the disparities in educational outcomes: less than half of Pacific (43%) learners complete their bachelor's degree within six years (2015–2021 average). This completion rate is 21 percentage points lower than the Pākehā (European New Zealander) completion rate of 64% (Tertiary Education Commission, 2023). Analysis of academic transcripts at one New Zealand university indicated that Pacific students are more likely to repeat papers than their non-Pacific cohort. Furthermore, Pacific students, on average, take more papers to complete a degree than Pākehā. For some degrees, Pacific students have taken 2.3 times more papers than Pākehā to obtain the same degree (institutional data). Furthermore, data from this university suggest Pacific students change their degree, and papers within the degree, more frequently than other

students. Data from 2019 found Pacific students changed their degree programme twice as frequently than the rate across all students (34% versus 17% respectively), and a larger proportion of Pacific students changed their major (36%) than the rate across all students (25%).

One potential reason these services are not equitable is that the individualistic foundations of universities are antithetical to many collectivist Pacific ideals. As such, even though all students may be offered the same support, the frameworks used to administer that support may differentially disadvantage Pacific students. Given the increasing proportion of Pacific students at university, it is incumbent upon universities to develop their internal processes to reduce barriers to retention, and to support Pacific student success. For course advising to be culturally responsive in a Pacific context, it is important to engage Pacific students and staff in the development of these systems. The present research aims to understand how Pacific students and staff engage with course advising at the University of Otago and what they envision for the development of this service. To do so, we conducted a series of talanoa (a Pacific research method similar to semi-structured focus groups) with both Pacific students and staff about course advising in the university. The study aimed to understand the role that course advising plays (or should play) in supporting Pacific success in its broadest sense.

## **Methods**

### ***Author positionality***

The research team consisted of Dr Marea Colombo, Ms Ruthie Holmes, and Dr Stephen Scott. Dr Colombo became interested in this topic during her time working as a pastoral support officer for Pacific students at the Pacific Islands Centre. Her motivation for this work has been watching many students struggle to navigate complicated and culturally unresponsive systems. Ms Holmes is a Solomon Islander and I-Kiribati student who was studying Pacific Islands Studies at the time of the research. Ms Holmes was heavily engaged in both cultural and academic student associations and often supported students who were in distress about courses. Dr Scott is a Māori academic who leads the Office of Student Success. His interests are in understanding the patterns in achievement of students and he works to increase student success.

### ***Methodology***

This research was conducted with the support of a Pacific Advisory Committee who helped guide the appropriate methodology, methods, and engagement strategies. This committee consisted of two academic staff, two professional staff, and two student advisors. It quickly emerged that using the Fa'afaletui research framework (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022) would be appropriate to engage with several different perspectives in a reasonable timeframe, and to establish a culturally responsive research environment that promoted safety and honest discussion amongst participants. Fa'afaletui (fa'a means "ways of", tui means "weaving together", and fale means "house/s") is based on the Sāmoan cultural epistemology of connectedness and collectivism, and involves engaging with representatives from a wide range of groups to better understand the entire community's perspectives on a given issue. This is particularly important given the heterogeneity of Pacific peoples in New Zealand. We therefore sought representation from a range of subgroups within the study population and were guided through this on advice from the Advisory Committee.

### ***Study participants***

Eligible participants were Pacific students enrolled in, or Pacific staff employed at, the University of Otago in 2022. The University of Otago is primarily a school-leaver destination university with

most first-year students being 18 years old. Students were recruited via Pacific student associations<sup>1</sup> and asked if they would be willing to participate in a conversation about course advising. Nineteen Pacific students took part in one of four talanoa, which involved providing food and sharing their experiences with the researchers in response to question prompts. Staff were invited via email by one of the researchers who had previously worked with Pacific staff. Nine Pacific staff participated in one of three talanoa. Participant demographic data is presented in Figure 1. To protect anonymity, all participants were provided with a unique identification number denoting their talanoa session first and their participant number second (for example, STUDENT 01-01 participated in the first talanoa as participant 01).

### ***Procedure***

Data were collected using the Talanoa research method (Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa (tala meaning “to talk” and noa meaning “nothing in particular, ordinary”) is a culturally nuanced approach to conversation used in various Pacific cultures. The principles of talanoa can be applied to a research context as a method not dissimilar to (but distinct from) facilitated semi-structured focus groups or interviews. In this study, participants were invited to a talanoa by one of the named researchers who facilitated open discussion about their experiences participating in course advice or general perspectives on effective Pacific course advising. There was no prescribed time limit or line of questioning; conversations were participant-led. It was assumed that topics discussed by the participants were deemed important and relevant. Talanoa were audio recorded and transcribed using online transcription software.

### ***Data analysis***

We used both an inductive and a deductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Subthemes were identified using an inductive process and fit into the overarching themes of cultural, process, and academic success. Each subtheme is presented with interwoven quotes directly from the talanoa, as suggested by King (2004), to bring participant voice to the forefront of this research.

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<sup>1</sup> There are 14 Pacific student associations currently affiliated with the University of Otago: six academic associations, seven cultural associations and one strategic association for coordination. They are a central hub for Pacific students and have a long history of participating in and organising Pacific students’ engagement with research initiatives. This made them an appropriate contact for participant recruitment.

**Figure 1**

*Demographic Data for Pacific Student and Staff Participants*

	<b>Pacific Students</b>	<b>Pacific Support Staff</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	5	3
Female	14	6
Diverse	0	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Sāmoa	7	5
Tonga	2	0
Cook Islands	3	0
Fiji	4	1
Niue	2	0
Tokelau	1	0
Kiribati	2	2
Solomon Islands	1	0
Hawaii	0	1
<b>Division</b>		
Humanities	7	2
Health Sciences	3	1
Commerce	2	0
Sciences	7	1
Foundation	0	1
Residential Colleges	n/a	1
Pacific Islands Centre	n/a	3
<b>Year of Study</b>		
One	1	n/a
Two	6	n/a
Three	7	n/a
Four	4	n/a
Five +	1	n/a

## Results

Our initial goal was to understand the role of course advising in cultural success (students feeling empowered in their Pacific cultural identity), process success (students understanding the role of course advising and being able to access course advice services), and academic success (students feeling more confident about their classes and their ability to succeed academically). For this reason, these categories make up our main themes.

### **Theme 1: Cultural success**

This theme encompassed ways in which students' Pacific culture was taken into consideration during the course advising process. Staff and students discussed the importance of holistic advising, culturally engaged advising, building relationships, and representation.

#### *Subtheme 1.1: Holistic advising*

Students highlighted the importance of course advice, focusing on course requirements in addition to financial, administrative, and career support:

*The whole admin side of things, how to apply for things like deadlines. How to apply for halls, and which hall to choose. (STUDENT 01-01)*

*You realise that it's not just academics, it just all falls under the umbrella of life. (STUDENT 01-02)*

Both students and staff expressed a desire for course advising to prepare students for university and ensure they are enrolled in a course that will showcase their talents:

*I wished someone told me to prepare mentally before moving away. Because uni is so different from high school and being at home. (STUDENT 04-01)*

*We need to ask more. What are you passionate about? Why do you want to do law? Think about who you want to be. (STAFF 01-01)*

Students and staff also discussed the importance of acknowledging that many Pacific students are first-in-family and may be missing key administrative support:

*Most [Palagi/non-Pacific students] come from a family of lawyers. They are studying law. You know, it's normal. But for us, there's a lot of first in the family. You know, it's a different space. (STAFF 02-01)*

#### *Subtheme 1.2: Culturally engaged advising*

Pacific students and staff identified that many staff who provide course advice are lacking knowledge about Pacific cultures:

*The course advising that you do [needs] cultural awareness. That's what's missing within this process. (STAFF 01-02)*

*... it'd be nice if someone actually took myself and my culture into consideration and actually talked to me about papers that I could take if I wanted to do further [university study]. (STUDENT 01-03)*

This cultural knowledge will ensure that the advice is beneficial for the student and increase the likelihood that the student will adopt the advice. Furthermore, students gravitated more towards advisors who were able to consider their culture:

*Interviewer: So when you get course advice, has anyone ever considered your culture as part of that?*

*Student: Just [Pacific staff]. (STUDENT 01-02)*

### *Subtheme 1.3: Building relationships*

Pacific staff and students highlighted the importance of building relationships with Pacific students to provide effective academic advice:

*There is no connection and students don't go because they don't feel comfortable. (STAFF 01-02)*

Students confirmed that they preferred to seek academic advice from those with whom they had an existing relationship:

*I enjoyed that connection. Connection to them. And not just hearing the voice and knowing their name. Knowing what you look like and where you're coming from. (STUDENT 04-02)*

Students found that the course advising session was more beneficial when they took a support person with them to these meetings—ideally a staff member who had a pre-existing relationship with the student:

*If [Pacific support staff] didn't come with me to my course advice [appointment], I wouldn't have gotten much out of it. (STUDENT 01-02)*

### *Subtheme 1.4: Representation*

Pacific students and staff agreed that representation is important in the course advising process; students felt more comfortable seeking advice from a Pacific advisor:

*You just initially gravitate to the people that you feel comfortable [with], who possibly may know what your life is like. (STAFF 01-02)*



Staff also advocated engaging community and family in the course advising process. Students indicated that they would feel more comfortable approaching a Pacific course advisor:

*I think we could relate more. If I told him about family back at home and how stressful it was up there, they understand. If I was to go to AskOtago [University of Otago Help Desk] ... I don't know if they'll understand. (STUDENT 04-01)*

It was suggested that this increased Pacific representation in course advising would encourage more Pacific families to engage with university events:

*... those course information evenings that we invite families to. All the other families come ... but Pacific families don't turn up. We need one specifically for Pacific [and] Māori. So that's delivered the Pacific and Māori way. (STAFF 01-01)*

*... more Pacific perspective in order to implement Pacific ways to help Pacific students. (STUDENT 01-04)*

#### *Subtheme 1.5: Opportunities for cultural learning*

Students also highlighted the importance of having courses that provide access to understanding Pacific content:

*The arts papers I picked were always centred around Pacific Islands ... because it's just interesting compared [to learning about] some European archaeology. For instance, like "oh we've found these [remains] in the Cook Islands", "oh I'm from there". (STUDENT 01-05)*

Some students said they would like to be informed about classes including Pacific content:

*... they're seeing my papers and they're offering me a chance to further my studies into my culture if I wanted to. I never thought of that until [Pacific support staff] told me I can. (STUDENT 01-03)*

### **Theme 2: Process success**

This theme encompassed ways in which process could change or develop to better support Pacific engagement in course advising. Students and staff agreed about the importance of early engagement with Pacific students. Students focused on the process challenges they experienced when interacting with course advice at university, including technical processes and clear communication of degree requirements. Staff focused on the process challenges they experienced trying to offer students advice before they arrived on campus, including increased Pacific pathways and informational evenings designed by, and for, Pacific.

### *Subtheme 2.1 Early engagement*

Pacific students and staff focused on the importance of early engagement with Pacific students:

*The support you get in high school is really important, having people understand what you're good at and seeing whether that's something you'd want to do long term.*  
(STUDENT 02-01)

First, early engagement will ensure that students can build relationships with individuals in the university and help view the transition as more achievable:

*If they meet people then, by Year 12, they think, "We saw those guys, they have been back a couple times". So, university is not this far distant thing lives in Zion somewhere. It's actually a real place.* (STAFF 01-04)

Second, early engagement helps students and families engage with the language of universities, making the adjustment to university far more attainable:

*We need to start introducing them to university language, as we know that's massive for our students.* (STAFF 01-04)

Finally, early engagement will ensure students are working effectively during their time at high school to prepare them for the transition to university, both academically and administratively:

*The potential for conversation. By the time they get to Year 11 they're trying to pay more attention in class.* (STAFF 01-04)

*... before you start the actual paper, you can [complete] admin stuff from learning what a degree looks like, how to build it, possible pathways you want to take.* (STUDENT 01-01)

### *Subtheme 2.2 Challenges with automated advising and online booking systems*

Students outlined a range of technical challenges with the current course advising system:

*Booking a course advice appointment, it wasn't easy.* (STUDENT 02-02)

*... would usually get appointment times when I have a class. I found it odd how we couldn't select the time, so we just apply for it, and they set a date.* (STUDENT 02-03)

Students also suggested improvements to the process to help them feel more comfortable with attending course advice, such as having more information about the course advisors available beforehand:

*We could have the people that are available for the slot that you want, and then a bit of background about them, because that's how I choose. (STUDENT 04-02)*

*The lady that I had for my course advice, I liked the way we interacted with each other. So, I'll probably go with her again because we connected. So, the description and a face to the name would be good. (STUDENT 04-03)*

Furthermore, students wanted a clear explanation of degree requirements, which they could not find when using the existing online system:

*... just taking the time to understand what we want to get out of [course advisors]. Instead of handing you what you're asking for. Because sometimes our questions are broad, but we don't realise they could be like specified into smaller details. (STUDENT 01-04)*

### *Subtheme 2.3 Increase pathway programs*

Pacific staff highlighted the importance of Pacific Pathway programmes—programmes designed to connect Pacific high school students with the university:

*[Pacific staff] developed a programme to have students from local high schools to come and have an experience here. (STAFF 01-01)*

These transition programmes need to support students academically, but also provide holistic support for students to be better prepared for university:

*It's to give them a picture of what the courses are, to look at what they have studied, and to create a pathway to support them, and discuss whether it is suitable for them. It is also providing guidance. To understand how to apply for college, and advising them to come and see us or book in. That's course advice for me. (STAFF 01-02)*

Some staff suggested, due to the requirement for relationship building, that Pacific staff are best placed to lead these programmes and provide course advice to Pacific students:

*Course advising for us is what the course advisors do, but with cultural awareness. It's about navigating through the university systems and processes to best help our students. And the bottom line is we do course advice. (STAFF 01-06)*

### **Theme 3: Academic success**

Staff were concerned about how course advising can have knock-on effects for students, including disrupting their wellbeing and restricting their entry into specific programmes. Students also discussed the connection between academic success and wellbeing.

#### *Subtheme 3.1: Performance and wellbeing*

Staff were very concerned about the completion rates of Pacific students:

*Is Pacific completion rate not something that the university is worried about right now?*  
(STAFF 01-03)

Staff discussed that the low completion rates impact students' ability to enter specific courses and their mental wellbeing:

*The students like to say, "It's all good", but in actual fact it's not all good. Because it affects them, their well-being as well.* (STAFF 01-04)

Students clearly stated that they performed best in courses they enjoyed:

*... I think it was one of my best marks, and [it] was probably my most fun paper.*  
(STUDENT 01-02)

*My grades definitely improved and it's one thing that I am very passionate about and I love to do so.* (STUDENT 01-03)

Comparatively, students failed papers they did not enjoy:

*I failed my business paper, so I lost interest after that.* (STUDENT 01-03)

*I feel like if I'd had that kind of support in high school, I wouldn't have like thousands of dollars of failed papers in subjects that I don't really like.* (STUDENT 03-05)

### **Discussion**

This research involved a series of talanoa with Pacific students and staff to understand the opportunities for improvement within academic course advising. After consultation with our Pacific Advisory Committee, we hypothesised that concerns about course advising would centre around three key factors: cultural success, process success, and academic success. The apparent focus from both students and staff was on cultural success, suggesting that cultural competency is not currently embedded in the course advising system. Both students and staff wanted increased cultural

awareness from course advisers to ensure their culture was taken into consideration when discussing course options, arguing that cultural safety will improve outcomes for Pacific students. Pacific staff also focused on process success and wanted course advice to begin in high school to help elucidate complicated university systems for students and families. While staff and students recognised the importance of advice in academic success, the academic component was the least discussed topic across all talanoa.

Cultural success was defined as the way in which students' Pacific identity was taken into consideration during the course advising process. Students and staff identified four key components to building successful cultural support. First, students and staff both emphasised the need for holistic advising that takes a "whole-of-student" approach, including academic, administrative, and emotional support. Many students found that their academic experience was disrupted as they navigated complex funding systems, housing challenges, and the transition from high school to university. These challenges were augmented when students could not readily identify the staff that could support them with these needs, increasing the likelihood that students would give up on seeking help.

Second, both students and staff expressed a desire for course advising to be responsive to the students' cultural needs, including understanding the potential mannerisms of Pacific students and pressures facing Pacific students:

*Brown people usually gravitate towards other brown people. Pacific Islanders ... our values and cultures are so much different to the Western values. (STUDENT 01-02)*

*Sometimes there are community expectations ... very sensitive. It's really important for someone who works with Pacific to pick up these issues. (STAFF 02-01)*

*If I talk about family back at home, [Pacific staff] understand. If I go elsewhere, I don't know if they'll understand. (STUDENT 04-01)*

Pacific students expressed feeling they were provided advice irrespective of their culture and often felt their cultural needs were not addressed in course advising. Student and staff responses highlight the importance of cultural training to equip Pacific staff members with tools to support Pacific students.

Third, students and staff outlined the importance of relationship building with course advisors and highlighted the potential benefits of effective case management systems so students could meet with the same advisor multiple times. In lieu of a case management system, Pacific students said they gained more from appointments when they were accompanied by a support person with whom they already had an established relationship. Finally, both staff and students expressed a desire for Pacific of representation in course advising as students are more drawn to communicating with Pacific staff.

Students and staff also highlighted concerns about the process of course advising. Students and staff agreed that universities should proactively engage with students prior to their arrival on campus, including elucidating university language, processes, and administrative challenges. Staff discussed the changes they would like to see in the course advising system. First, staff said they thought

Pacific staff should be employed to connect high school students to university, particularly as they are the support staff with whom the student will engage during their university experience.

Staff advocated for information evenings by Pacific, for Pacific to engage community and family in the course advising process. Previous research has not extensively investigated the role of community involvement in advising. Pacific students frequently mentioned their family and their community as driving factors for their university education:

*I'm doing a Bachelor of Arts. I really enjoy the course, but it's more of me being concerned about what my family and what my community will think about it, because that's not what I came here to do. (STUDENT 04-02)*

Given the importance of community to Pacific students, family should be included in a “whole-of-student” approach, and future research should investigate the role of community and family in student decision-making. Kim et al. (2016) argued that providing culturally sensitive guidance, considering students' cultural values and expectations, and tailoring advising strategies can enhance the advising experience. The current design of course advice excludes the option for family engagement—family involvement should be an explicit option for Pacific students. Even the physical structure of buildings can be limitations—if students know they are going to a small cubicle with one chair, they may not believe they can invite their family for support (Chung-Tiam-Fook et al., 2022).

Some students expressed concerns regarding the increasing automation of course advising. Many universities have focused on ways to make course advising more efficient; online platforms, virtual advising tools, and data analytics have emerged as promising resources for enhancing the advising process (Roushan et al., 2014). Some researchers argue that the digitisation of academic course advising is inevitable and necessary for effective course advising (Pelletier, 2021). It is crucial, however, to strike a balance between technology-mediated advising and maintaining personalised, human interactions (Assiri et al., 2020). Indeed, Pelletier's study found that using automated advising did increase engagement for some—but not all—students, raising the question of whether course advising is serving the success of all students equally. In universities with highly automated systems, programme and paper selection can be undertaken without the requirement of meeting an adviser. Pacific students found an online process lacked the relationship building that is foundational to supporting them and is central to a Pacific worldview.

Students and staff did not readily discuss the academic implications of course advising. One potential reason for this dearth of discussion is that students are not able to link their academic advising to their academic journey. Although we cannot confirm this theory, it raises concerns about academic advising, nonetheless. If the goal of advising is to support the academic journey, but students are not making these connections, that should raise questions about the efficacy of course advising. Students did, however, outline the relationship between their mental wellbeing and their academic performance. Students who underperformed in these classes said that experience took a mental toll on them, from which they often took years to recover. Failure also flowed into other courses as their self-efficacy was affected. These discussions further highlight the importance of early engagement with Pacific students to ensure they enrol in courses that showcase their talent and promote positive wellbeing during their academic journey. Moreover, given the reported importance of family and community in students' decision-making, it is pertinent to involve family and community in these discussions.

Interestingly, although we interviewed students at different stages of study and staff who worked with a variety of students, many of the findings relate to the impacts of early intervention. Many students discussed the challenges they faced as school leavers and the impact this transition had on their academic journey. Furthermore, staff highlighted the importance of having Pacific student-specific transition programmes to support Pacific students moving from high school to university. Data from the Ministry of Education show Pacific students are less likely to complete their bachelor's degree in six years than their non-Pacific counterparts. Given the discussion from staff and students, it is important to understand the factors extending the degree completion time among Pacific students. If students are found to spend a few years identifying a subject they enjoy, then the research findings here become even more important; culturally engaged course advising has the opportunity to reduce the timeframe for attaining a bachelor's degree for Pacific students.

This is the first research that has specifically engaged Pacific voices in the context of course advising. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students and staff advocated for holistic course advising models, consistent with the previous research for other cohorts. Importantly, the talanoa highlighted the importance of cultural responsiveness when engaging with Pacific students, and the vital role of community in decision-making. Despite the individualistic rhetoric that pervades universities, many Pacific students still hold collectivist values (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011). We have a unique opportunity to work with, and learn from, students who approach their education from this cultural background. As previously stated, while we tried to engage with students from a diverse Pacific background, many Pacific communities were not represented in our talanoa. As such, we caution against a "one-size-fits-all" approach to working with Pacific students and hope this research highlights the adjustments that could provide more effective course advising for this cohort. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of advising interventions on student career development and post-graduation success. Additionally, there is a need for research that examines the intersectionality of student identities and how advising can support students with multiple identities. Moreover, understanding the impact of course advising in emerging fields, such as online education and competency-based learning, requires further investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Pacific students represent the fastest growing student cohort in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2014) and Australia (Pale et al., 2023). It is incumbent upon universities to develop their services to best support Pacific students during their academic journey. This research provides preliminary evidence to suggest course advising needs to take a holistic approach that allows for relationship building, cultural understanding, and the ability to support students with academic, administrative, and emotional advice. It is crucial to understand that academic success for Pacific peoples is more about the whole student being a successful member of the university community than simple measures of academic pass rates. Furthermore, it is important to connect early with potential students. Pacific staff suggest engaging them in the design and execution of opportunities that connect the university to high school students and the wider community. Identifying the factors that hinder Pacific students' engagement with, and adherence to, course advice should be a priority for universities. This study contributes important perspectives on the role of course advising for Pacific students and offers recommendations for tertiary institutions to improve their course advising services to reduce attrition rates for Pacific students.

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