



FIRST IN FAMILY

First in Family explores the experience of 'First in Family' students (FiF) — defined as those whose parents did not attend higher learning institutions — as they make their way through a year of study, primarily their first, at the University of Auckland in 2019. Our students are enrolled in a range of disciplines and drawn from the Māori, Pasifika, international, former refugee and Pākehā working-class communities.

Although the site stands alone it is also an integral part of an international academic study conducted by Dr 'Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki, and colleagues. Research shows that FiF students significantly underperform at university and are at risk of dropping out, especially during their first year. They tend to come from low socio-economic backgrounds, live on the fringe of more than one culture and report feeling out of place at universities. This complex relationship with institutional life can have significant impact on FiF student success, especially at first year, and consequently whether they continue with their study. Universities are often aware of the progress of this student cohort and some of the difficulties they face, but they tend to be included in more generalised programmes, for example, those designed to assist first year students as a

whole, or within those that address the needs of ethnic minorities. We believe that the film, in highlighting the common first in family status of an otherwise diverse group of students, could offer up research useful in helping FiF and universities improve the former's academic outlook.

First in Family, then, functions as qualitative research within a broader academic project, which itself complements the more quantitative statistical approach to the FiF experience with its focus on retention rates, pass rates and grades. FiF families, though often supportive, do not always understand student needs, or are not able to provide their children with sufficient scaffolding to succeed. Very often, FiF students have more domestic responsibilities, work extended hours in employment, may not have English as their first language, lack quiet spaces to work, and tend to live further away from campus thus facing additional costs of transport. Some FiF, mainly former refugees, have experienced dislocation and trauma. In collecting together the vibrant and diverse stories of our students' lives, *First in Family* will be valuable to those developing educational policy. But the film will also reach beyond the academic realm, engaging a broad range of stakeholders through its public outreach — parents, potential and former students, the interested public, in fact a large general audience.

Methodology: We contacted students by reaching out through students lists – and in some ways, this may have skewed our selection given it could be that the more confident students were interested in participating, particularly those who were comfortable being interviewed in English. We gave each students a Westfield voucher for donating us their time.

We interviewed three students twice – [Faith](#), [Moana](#) and [Tyler](#) – at the beginning and end of their first year of study. Yobi, Gupreet, [Arapeta](#), [Java](#) and [Shelby](#) interviewed just once. The interviews were transcribed and will

be available to be used in First in Family scholarship that will appear in journals and books. Elements of the interviews were edited together into 'YouTube' length excerpts, and formed the basis to a series of biographies of the students. We worked with a series of photographers – Edith Amituanui, Julie Zhu, Renke An and Serena Stevenson, who shot photo essays of each student to add visual interest. Our plan has been to develop a rich site that the brings together different elements that reader/user can browse as they prefer.



Arapeta's Story - Click image below to view clip



Arapeta was raised in Northland before moving to Auckland to study at Elam School of Arts at the University of Auckland. A member of various iwi based across the North Island, Arapeta's Māori heritage strongly influences his performance-based artwork, as well as his wider outlook on the world. Being the first in his family to enter tertiary education, Arapeta is honoured to represent his whakapapa in the world of university, having been constantly urged by his parents when he was younger. At the same time, being first in family has deprived him of role models from within his whānau, and Arapeta is determined to do well so that future generations can look up to him as an example.



Now studying for a Masters of Fine Arts at Elam, Arapeta has already produced art exhibits, drawing on his upbringing with his whānau to inform his installation art. Although he was always interested in the creative world, it took going to the University of Auckland for Arapeta to realise that he could make it as an artist, having initially considered studying medicine at a different institution. While Arapeta does not regret his chosen path, he has found that the university has its flaws, having disagreed with the decision by the UoA to close down a number of libraries.

“The Elam libraries, the Fine Arts Library and the Creative Arts Libraries, Education Library, all of their closures, I think is a really, really not intelligent decision to make in terms of the university, in terms of a place that relies on its resources and knowledge. Taking those away, I think is a big mistake.”



Highlight in Arapeta's journey:

A big moment in Arapeta's education was attending the Māori graduation at the University of Auckland's Waipapa Marae. Aware that the University is a traditionally Western institution, the presence of a Māori space on campus has allowed him to maintain the links to his heritage in otherwise Pakeha surroundings. Outside the Marae, Arapeta has also maintained his Māori outlook on art, contrasting it with what he sees as the Western tendency to separate artistic endeavours from the context within which they emerge.



Whānau support:

Arapeta's approach to his studies is the support he has received from his whānau, which has helped him in his quest to maintain traditional Māori culture in the 21st century.

“I think for Māori people, and especially for my whānau, to pursue and to uphold the integrity and our culture through education is so important, especially coming to a university.”

This support has helped Arapeta deal with the various challenges of being the first in his family to go to university. Key to this was empowering him to stand on his own two feet in the face of uncertainty, which has given him the confidence to complete his Bachelor's and undertake the next stage of his education with his Master's degree.

Faith's Story - Click image below to view clip

"There was this expectation of me, being the oldest of five kids, to become something and to make something of myself..."



Faith grew up in South Auckland with her Māori mother and Samoan father, as well as four younger siblings and her maternal grandparents. Although neither of her parents finished high school, they always wanted Faith to go to university, which she has now done, initially enrolling in Geography and Communications. However, after attending the Arts orientation day, she changed her course of study:

"I was sitting in the lecture theatre just thinking to myself, is Communications and Geography actually my passions? Or have I just decided to take it because my teachers have encouraged me to do it based on my strengths in high school?"



Faith took the Dean's advice to follow her passion and changed to a Bachelor's in Māori Studies and also enrolled in Criminology. She feels her upbringing was more orientated towards her Pacific heritage, and wanted to enrich her understanding of her Māori whakapapa. Although Faith doesn't have a specific career in mind, she hopes to use what she learns from tertiary study to help advocate for Māori and Pasifika people.

Family & University support:

Now preparing for her second year of university, her interest in Criminology has led to expanded her degree into a Law (LLB) conjoint. In general, Faith found university far less daunting than she was expecting and has managed to keep up her studies while starting a part-time job. Along with making friends with fellow students, she has also made use of Tuākana and the Māori Academic Programme, which has provided her with culturally specific support during her time at university, helping her feel more secure as a woman of colour who is the first in her family to attend university. Faith highly recommends others making use of the services offered by the University of Auckland. Faith has found tertiary education to

be more enjoyable than she was expecting, in part due to this support, which has helped with her initial anxiety about letting her parents down:



“There was this expectation of me, being the oldest of five kids, to become something and to make something of myself... She's going to make this amount of money. She's going to be the best wherever she works. It kind of puts a lot of pressure on me, especially as the oldest.”

Despite adapting well to University, Faith acknowledges there are still hardships involved, not least the 40-minute train ride from home to campus, as well as the balance between family life and studying. Faith has also found it difficult to approach most of her lecturers but has been more successful with tutors or classmates.

Faith as role model:

Despite these challenges, Faith is determined to complete her studies, combining the support from University services with that from her family. Although the prospect of being the first in family comes with pressure, the pride her family has shown is a strong motivating factor. Faith is aware that her younger siblings will themselves have to decide whether or not to attend

university. Having already served as something of a second mother to them growing up, Faith hopes to serve as a role model for them, and for her wider community by completing her degree.



Moana's Story - Click image below to view clip

"Going to University has been a personal goal ...but I'm also doing it for my grandparents."

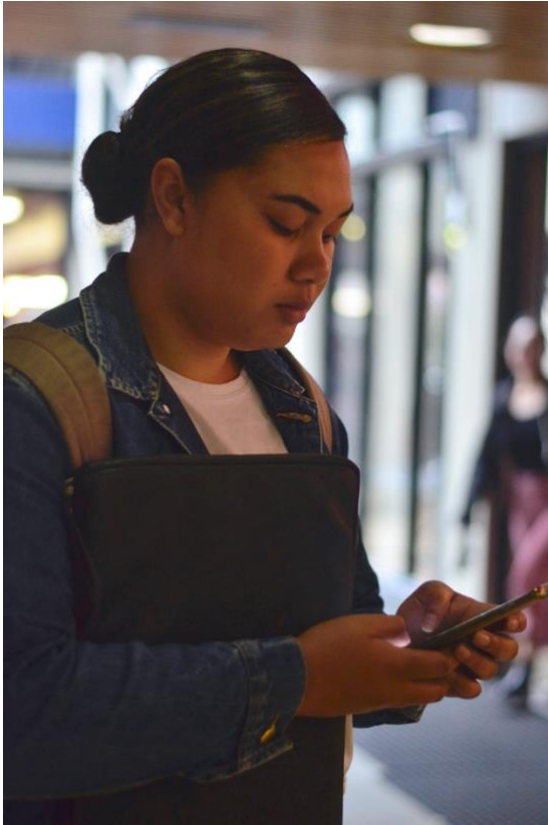


The daughter of a Japanese factory manager and a Samoan worker, Moana relocated to New Zealand at a young age to live with her grandparents. Moana grew up in West Auckland with her Samoan grandparents, who she refers to as 'mum and dad'. Although life in West Auckland has its financial hardships, her 'mum and dad' work hard to put on a brave face for Moana, who considers herself privileged to have grown up with them.



"[Going to university has] always been a personal goal of mine but also for my grandparents. I really wanted to go to uni for them. I'm definitely not here just for me. I'm here for both of them."

Her grandparents encouraged her to attend university after she graduated from Kelston Girls College, where she excelled at playing netball. One teacher in particular was supportive of her attending university, recognising Moana's aspirations and her ability. Initially she intended to study Engineering, but switched to a conjoint course of study in Commerce and Global Studies with the intention of using what she learns to give back to the Samoan community. Closer to home Moana is also hoping to set a good example for her younger siblings, including a sister who is still at secondary school.



Moana has found her year demanding but nonetheless added to her workload by picking up a minor in Japanese. Although she expected a certain level of stress involved with attending university, Moana was surprised to find herself angered by a lack of Pasifika viewpoints in some of her courses and has discussed this with the Director of her degree.

“A lot of times I'm angry at the work we're given because I...do feel like sometimes I'm not represented well or that lecturers don't understand our views well enough.”

Moana has become something of an advocate for promoting the Pasifika viewpoint. She has felt her confidence grow during the year. At the beginning of her study, she would not have been able to challenge her lecturers about these issues. Part of what spurred her to do this was a sense that it would help Pasifika who follow her at the University of Auckland. Moana appreciates the culturally specific support offered to her by the Tuākana and Leadership Through Learning programmes. These programmes have complemented the bridging course Moana took part in to help her during the transition to tertiary study, along with her Uni Bound mentor, who has given her advice that she plans to pass on to her siblings.



Moana felt that a Commerce and Global Studies conjoint would put her in a good position to empower her community. However, she also believes that the act of being the first in her family to go to university would itself serve as an inspiration. This task naturally comes with some pressure, which Moana is navigating along with the need to balance the demands of university and family life.

Tyler's Story - Click image below to view clip

"It's very overwhelming, just the amount of study that you really have to do if you want to do well."



Tyler grew up in South Auckland with his Māori mother and Pākehā father, both of whom left high school early to enter the workforce. However, they encouraged the academically-minded Tyler to complete secondary education and be the first in his family to enter university, where he is now studying for a Bachelor of Engineering with the help of two scholarships that he won. After graduating, Tyler hopes to get a job in his chosen field and use the income to help his parents, while at the same time serving as a role model to his younger relatives.

Having now completed his first year of university, Tyler intends to continue studying. Currently staying at Grafton Hall of residence, his close proximity to campus is a convenient space for him and his friends, particularly around exams. Tyler has found the free online website Piazza to be a useful tool to

answer questions that arise about his course. The Māori Academic Excellence scholarship, and Hynds Foundation, have both supported him, combining financial support with a mentor. These support have helped Tyler deal with the stresses of university, particularly the increased workload.

“But then I guess once you get over that learning curve at the start, and then you kind of settle into uni more, it’s a pretty great experience.”



While the support has made studying easier, Tyler was led to believe that the size of the University of Auckland would make it daunting while smaller institutions would be more forthcoming with their support due to smaller student numbers. After spending a year studying at UoA, Tyler was happy to report that he found staff at UoA to be open and very willing to give him advice and support.



Tyler's family live only half an hour away and their relationship remains strong, with his mother especially proud of her son. Before even entering university, Tyler was determined to support her and sees engineering as a way of giving back.

"I'm just hoping that once I get out of uni I can help her have an easier life, so she can survive on the income that she already has."



With a sister in her last years of secondary school, Tyler is aware that she also feels the pressure to go to university. He is counselling her to follow her own path in life. Outside of his family, Tyler hopes that his example will help inspire his wider community to attend university, particularly members of his iwi, Tuhoi.

Shelby's Story - Click image below to view clip

"I am so, so grateful that [my parents] would want to send me off to university, even though it's halfway across the world and I want to thank them for believing in me..."



Shelby's family moved around a lot during her early life, which was spent in areas such as Hong Kong and the United States. She now lives here in New Zealand, where she has enrolled in the University of Auckland. The first person in her family to go on to tertiary education, Shelby is majoring in English and Media, with hopes to possibly enter Screen Production.

Although neither of her parents went to university, they encouraged their eldest daughter to study hard at school to lay the groundwork for a degree, with Shelby initially considering Veterinary Science. Having found the thought of cutting animals up unappealing however, Shelby instead chose to study Arts, drawing on her passion for creativity. This was not an easy choice, but Shelby is glad that she made it and is thankful to her parents for believing in her.



Family and peer support:

At the same time, being let go was not easy. Making matters harder was Shelby's unfamiliarity with the people and culture of New Zealand, as well as the nature of university in general. Unlike earlier stages of education, Shelby has found tertiary study to be a relatively isolated experience, with everyone's clashing timetables making it difficult to form connections. Shelby has been meeting a number of other international students, including from Shelby's home country, who share her experience in coming to a new place to learn. Their support, not to mention that from her parents, has helped Shelby feel more secure in her time at university. With dreams to be a published fiction author, Shelby is aware that she will have to do less interesting work in the interim but is confident that she will be able to forge a path for herself as a writer, in part due to the growth she is doing at university.

"I feel like I would look back at today and think that wow, I was so different back then...for sure I will be a totally different person. The last two years have been lots of growth for me and I'm sure that in the next three years it'll be a lot more."



Part of this growth has been understanding she doesn't have to be perfect and that in a new environment it is natural to feel a bit disconnected at times. This has helped Shelby build a resilience which complements her academically-minded nature and should help her through her experience as the first person in her family to go to university.

JAVA

"I found it is relatively easy due to my friendships with other uni students... They've been able to guide me as my parents are not really able to advise me."



Java's Story

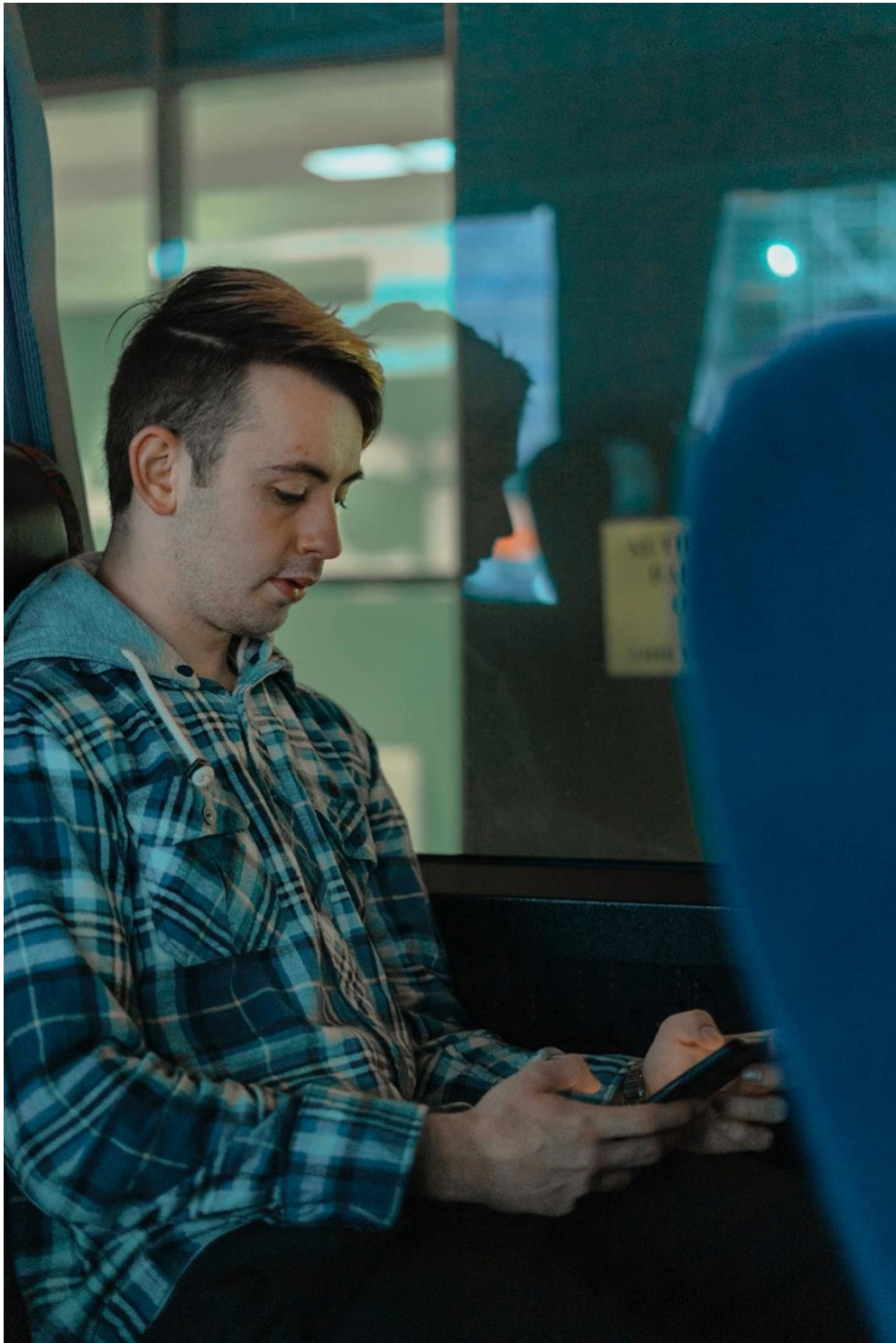
Java grew up in Kerikeri with his mother and stepdad, neither of whom attended university. However, towards the end of his high school years, Java decided that he would become the **first in his family to attend tertiary education** on the advice of careers' counselors and inspired by friends that were also attending. Having enjoyed photography at high school, Java is taking a conjoined degree of Media and Communication and Computer Science, seeing the latter as a potential fallback in case studying filmmaking doesn't translate into a career.



Although Java has moved to Auckland away from his family, he has a lot of friends at University that went to his high school, and is currently flatting with some of them. These connections gave him useful support during his relocation to Auckland, which separated him from his family. His friends have also helped him during his study.



Java feels at times the institution itself has not done an adequate job of explaining some of its complexities. Generally speaking, however, he has had a fairly good time at university, and was surprised when one of his lecture halls erupted in applause for first in family students like him.



When Java was growing up, his **parents were always supportive of his passions**, which now extends to his attending university. Although he experienced some anxieties, this wore off towards the end of his time at high school. Java took a gap year before moving down to Auckland to study. Travelling the world exposed Java to the many realities, making him feel privileged to live in New Zealand and confirming his desire to go on to tertiary education. Having taken the knowledge he obtained overseas back with him, Java hopes that he can help bring New Zealand's media industry into the 21st century.

"We are cultivating an interesting output of diverse graduates... and are ripe for expansion. It would be great New Zealand see more cultural exports as it is so much easier to distribute culture in the 21st century."