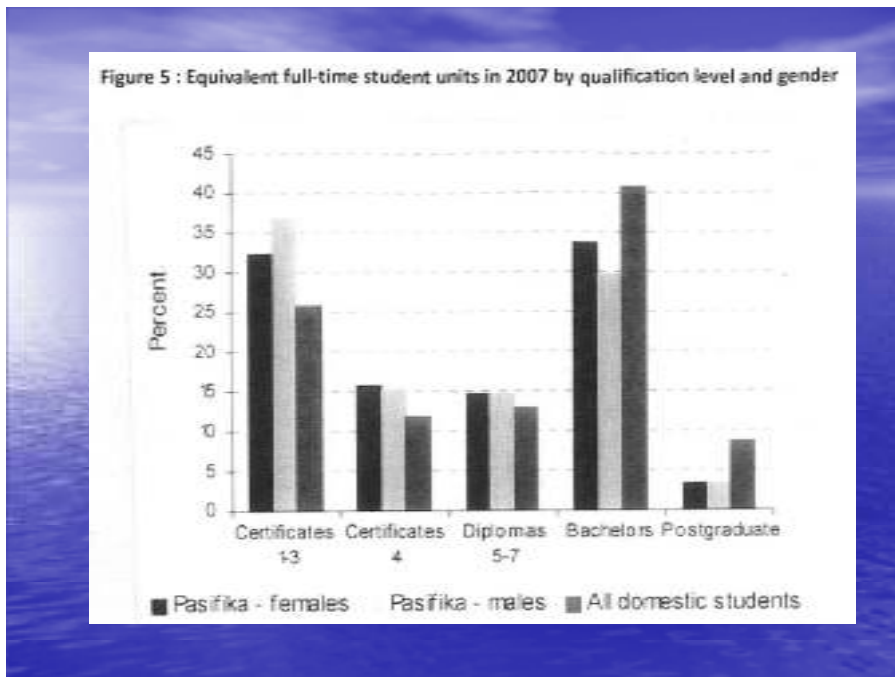


PACIFIC WOMEN GRADUATES IN AOTEAROA *Learning to say 'no' and 'help'*

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The NZFUW and local branches have been supporting Pacific women graduates in the region for many years through scholarships, sponsoring participation in regional and global IFUW conferences and, the invaluable mentoring of the Pacific Women's Graduate Network.

I propose that the NZFUW consider supporting New Zealand based Pacific women post graduates. There are many reasons for this. First, Pacific people are not achieving well in education in New Zealand today. Given the necessary relationship between education and economic and social participation, this is a serious concern for Pacific families and communities and for national development as well. Second, as seen below, a very small number of Pacific students are progressing on to post graduate study. There is urgency in increasing the numbers of Pacific students in post graduate study, because these are the group who through scholarship and research are most likely to capture and mediate the Pacific voice in strategic decision-making forums and, build community understanding of how government organises and how Pacific people can input into government processes. Third, more Pacific women are enrolling in tertiary study and are achieving better than Pacific males. As seen in Fig 1, women's undergraduate level enrolments are higher than males although this does level out at post graduate level.



However, despite their higher educational participation, women's political participation is much lower than males. Women's fullest participation is vital, and has become especially important given the recent increases in the numbers of Pacific solo households (Family Commission Report 1/09). NZFUW could consider ways of nurturing Pacific women's participation..

This study

This exploratory study was carried out with a group of women currently in post graduate study with the aims of opening up points for further in-depth study and to identify potential intervention points for the NZFUW. The survey included questions of why and how this group had decided to enrol in post graduate study, what factors had 'kept' them in, any challenges, constraints and opportunities and, their advice to other women contemplating post graduate study. Twelve invitations to participate were sent to post grad students known to the researcher and nine post grads agreed to participate. These represented five universities¹. While the survey sheet stated 'please give this only 5 minutes' responses showed that most had taken considerable care in considering the questions and one said, 'thanks for asking ...' That the sample was not random is no doubt be reflected in the data.

This paper is in three parts. First, a profile of this group of students, second, the survey findings and third, some suggestions about how NZFUW might support Pacific women graduates. A given for this study is that Pacific scholars are giving priority to Pacific focussed research - so their scholarship has an empowerment dimension as well.

GROUP PROFILE (2009)

By ethnicity (self- defined) the sample group comprised Samoan (5), Tokelauan (1), Tongan(1); Niuean/ Samoan (1); Tongan/ Samoan (1). Courses of study were Post Graduate Diploma (1) Hons (1); Masters (3); Ph D (3) and post doctoral (1). The age range of this group was 23 to 56 years. Seven of the nine were married at the time of the study. Of the other two, one had never married and one was now a solo parent. Eight of the nine were mothers and three were grandmothers. One had cared for her aged father for many years. Table 1 listing gives some indication of this groups' immediate family responsibilities.

Table 1: Numbers of children, grandchildren by participants

| Children | Number of Participants |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 0 | 1 participant |
| 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 4 |
| 5 | 0 |
| 6 | 1 |
| Grandchildren | 3 participants |

While this was not asked, other responses revealed that each of these women were strongly committed to their extended families, churches, the wider Pacific community and 'standing up for the Pacific in our workplace.' One summed this up with the words that 'because we are Pacific, all the Pacific 'bad cases' land on my door'. Each acknowledged these commitments with words such as 'we have had the benefits and so it is right that we help' and, 'we have to be good role models'. But there was also a feeling that 'we have got to learn to say 'no!'.

By course of study, seven of the nine were in a Pacific labelled course. The other two were studying in Education but, their thesis topics were Pacific focussed. Whilst this was not

¹ These were Otago, Victoria, Massey (Palmerston North and Albany Campus)

surprising given the selection process, this finding also emphasised the priority this group gave to Pacific scholarship.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Pacific Studies labelled course | Pacific Peoples, Pacific Studies, Pacific Studies: Information and public management systems in the Pacific; Pacific Studies and Physical Education |
| Education | Thesis related to Pacific <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M Ed Planning • Ph D Education (Pacific learners) |

One of this group had continued her study from secondary school, to undergraduate through to post graduate. One other had progressed similarly through to MA study and then had worked for a few years before deciding to go on to Ph D study. She had combined her Ph D study with raising two young children. For the other seven, periods of university study had been punctuated with various lengths of time at work and, child raising:

My undergraduate degree was completed in 1981 and I started my post grad in 2006 – almost a quarter of a century later. Although I did a couple of other undergraduate courses in that period

POST GRADUATE EXPERIENCES

Findings are set out in six sections and draw heavily on women’s voices with the use of quantitative data in some instances. Responses fell naturally into personal, family and people related issues and those related to study. Some challenges, but not all, could be said to be ‘Pacific’ ,

1 What made you decide to do post graduate study?

Each said their decision had been influenced by a mixture of factors. However, the family was a central consideration in every case. For this group, family included the extended family, both parents, fathers, mothers and husbands and children:

My Tongan father had always pushed me hard to study. My Tongan husband already had a Ph D and valued me studying and getting my own. Everyone in my family was very enabling. We were all committed to it.

Without a miss, our mother kept reminding us, after our evening lotu that education was the key to the future. The memories of how they provided us with the love rather than what they said, is stronger therefore, gives me courage to keep striving.

To make good my word to my father that I will one day be a doctor (though I didn’t know at the time what that was)

My daughter wants me to graduate with my doctorate!

Teachers and lecturers had also been important motivators:

I never intended to do postgrad study... I thought that was difficult to get into. It wasn’t until I got to the end of my BA that I tried a postgrad course (for interest) in Samoan epistemologies and got a taste of what p/g research was about that I got interested ... support and encouragement from staff was a significant factor in my moving on to p/g study.

(she said) why don't you go for your MA? I thought 'hey why not?' Before that I hadn't really thought about that

(I was) inspired by teachers, other students, my children and my passion and interest in Pacific studies and some of the topics being offered in post graduate papers.

Table 2 lists other than family factors which motivated this group, including the satisfaction of learning, career and job related gains and, feelings of benefits for 'the Pacific' through study:

Table 2: Why women decided to undertake post graduate study

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Personal Self fulfilment | 4 | <i>Always had a passion for learning –wish I could afford the luxury of full time study.</i> <i>The new knowledge that I gained from my previous study... made me want to find out more</i> <i>Trying to better myself as mother, my career, my support to aiga</i> |
| Pacific 'good' | 2 | <i>Me, as a Tokelau woman: Knowing who I am, my place in that space and my role and responsibilities were blessings. These give me the purpose for why I have to do what is required to be done.(I keep asking myself) what new things can I give my family people...If I don't cast my net further?</i> <i>I was in a job where Ph D's were prestigious and I was trying to build up Pacific research capacity. ..It seemed an obvious step given the core message I was trying to get out there.</i> |
| Employment related | 2 | <i>Better employment options</i> <i>I knew I can do a better job with higher qualifications</i> |

2 What kept you in your study?

Faith...faith in the Lord that all things are possible through him

As seen in Table 3, the factors which kept women in study were very similar to those which had motivated this group to enrol in higher level study. Family related factors and providing a good example were instrumental as were job related factors, individual satisfaction and a belief that they were 'benefiting the Pacific':

Table 3: What kept you in post graduate study?

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Family | 9 | <i>My children, husband, mother, support of aiga</i> <i>My family, in particular my husband and children and work related obligations</i> <i>Family – the need to support my children and be a role model for them to do better</i> |
|--------|---|---|

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| | | <i>My family. Me as a mother. Like every other parent, my wish is for my children to make sensible choices and to be successful at school and life after school. So, rather than me talking and telling them, I thought role modelling was important too.</i> |
| Study related | 5 | <i>Good grades... realising I was actually doing well kept me wanting to keep going</i> <i>Encouragement and support from lecturers and family; interesting courses and research</i> |
| Personal | 2 | <i>I hate not completing what I start</i> <i>Not finishing was never an option... I'd invested so much of my time...(time away from my kids) I was absolutely driven... even though it was hard at times.</i> |
| Ability to influence decisions | 3 | <i>A sense of having academic credibility to do the work that I do... I felt more able to influence decisions (at certain levels of community and government) for people at grassroots level who are marginalised and disempowered.</i> |
| Pacific Empowerment | 2 | <i>Empowerment for us (Pacific)</i> <i>The more I learn, I can be in a more influential position to help my people</i> <i>My desire to contribute to the Pakeha community and the larger NZ society</i> |

Clearly, post graduate study for this group was very much a family affair, a family achievement and, a Pacific achievement.

3. Challenges

As a Tokelau it has been lonely... but that is a big part of why I am still here.

Finances, loneliness, 'juggling' multiple roles (the word juggling was used by five of the nine); and there were also some study related challenges. Age was mentioned with the words 'the heart is willing, but the legs finding it harder'

Table 4: Financial challenges and how these were met

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Family | 9 | <i>My family was surviving on one income... and so times were tough financially.</i> |
| Jobs | 9 | <i>I take any little job that comes...</i> <i>Finances were always a pain. I kept on doing work for money to pay for various things, community obligations got a bit out of hand.</i> |
| Scholarships | 6 | <i>e.g Women's Graduates local branches (2) Ministry of Education, PPTA, HRC</i> |
| Student Loans | 4 | <i>Financial challenges, meeting family needs and servicing a student debt that gets bigger with post-graduate study!</i> |
| Student support | 1 | |
| Staff development | 5 | |
| DPB | 1 | |

There is no question that finances were a major obstacle for all participants. Again, the family met this need - ‘always there’ and ‘family made great sacrifices for my study’. The question each continually asked themselves was ‘should we go out to work?’ However, this was always tempered by the knowledge that ‘they (the family) really want me to stay’.

All participant took ‘any’ job that came along, secured partial scholarships, took out student loans and, in five cases benefited from staff development schemes (Table 4). One had been granted a PPTA scholarship to complete her thesis. While most scholarships were partial – each had been very gratefully received:

I got \$500 from the Lower Hutt University Women. Some would say that isn't much. But for me and my family, this came just at the right time. I took my family to the ceremony. It was a great honour for us all

Juggling multiple roles (the word juggling was used by five of the nine respondents) and loneliness were noted along with study related factors (see Tables 5 and 6). Age was mentioned with the words ‘the heart is willing by the legs are finding it harder!’ and one said her health had been affected by study pressures:

We can't drop any of the balls we balance – mother, wife, daughter, daughter in law, sister, sister in law, cousin, aunty, professional career (big job); groups and boards we belong to, Sunday School Teacher, tausi...

My ability to juggle everything being the main provider, mother and care giver for my father as well as the older woman of the aiga, looking after the family home and extended aiga... and the responsibilities of working full –time.

Table 5: Personal challenges to post graduate study

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Juggling ... multiple roles | 8 | <i>The numerous activities/ events I needed to still be involved in that needed my time and commitment. Family faalavelave, supporting my daughter in caring for our grandson, supporting my son who lives overseas with his sports and time with him and with my husband and my own sense of being on task</i> |
| Family –related | 6 | <i>While my family provided me with the strengths it also has been a real challenge in trying to fulfil my role as a mother, grandmother, a wife, sibling and a daughter to my mother (in the homeland) and at the same time aim to meet my course deadlines.</i> <i>Getting head time at home. People don't understand what getting a higher qualification entails.</i> <i>Accommodating families seeking assistance (from the islands) overcrowding had a huge impact on our family (mentally, physically, financially)....Draining... used to having our space.</i> |
| Community | 6 | <i>Having to work full time and other various commitments that come with work for community is demanding on time, on top of family and church commitments. They all compete for your time, energy and resources ... is a challenge to juggle and prioritise and learning to be tough and say 'No' to other community and extended family commitments.</i> |

Balancing ‘many responsibilities’ was an important ‘taleni’ (skills) for this group. Four said they were ‘trying’ to learn how to say ‘no!’ and one noted the effects of study on her health.

Study related challenges were in two categories- Pacific related and more generic issues (see Table 6). Loneliness (academic) came through strongly especially for those who were the first graduate from that house / family. There was also a shyness of whom do I turn to for ‘the other voice’.

Table 6: Study related challenges to post graduate study

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Pacific scholarship and research | <i>At university, I always have to justify the validity of Pacific epistemology and methodology</i> |
| English as a second language | <i>(Post graduate study) brought a lot of challenges...it was taking me longer to complete a piece of writing than others whose English was first language.... So I put in more time ... meaning less sleep)</i> |
| Supervisors | <i>Finding an appropriate supervisor</i> <i>Having supervisors go away on research and study (10-12 mth!!)</i> <i>Ensure you have a woman supervisor! I had two males ... and through my two babies they had no idea...</i> |
| Extra mural study | <i>Discipline as a distance student ... keeping on target (2)</i> |
| University administration | <i>...administration side of things at the university...length of time to get something auctioned</i> |

Four had experienced difficulty finding a supervisor. For one, the issue was one of gender and, ethnicity

Having little choice in your supervisor – like I have two male supervisors – there were not other Pacific female academics who could supervisor me

Some surprise that universities didn’t support Pacific students better given the PBRF paybacks was noted. One said there had been no real tangible or intangible effort to help her complete. ‘No career planning, no computer, no desk, no photocopying, no departmental support, no nothing really’. Instead:

I was completed isolated and unsupported and had to find my mentoring and support resources elsewhere.

4. Discrimination

Three said they were 'not that aware of' any discrimination and one added that she had experienced 'nothing but positive ness when working with Pacific staff'. Others felt they had experienced discrimination by family, university staff, workmates and other Pacific women who were both a support and a 'challenge':

Some members of my family thought I should just be concentrating on raising the bratleys and that's enough study for now:

... (university lecturer) asked what could we do with our degree in Pacific Studies after our studies? Her comment gave me the impression that she did not think much of the course...

Some colleagues thought I was being privileged with being given time to attend lectures and that after the first year of having this privilege I should not get any more support (A palagi and Maori colleagues)

Our own Pacific women can be our greater supporters and at the same time our greatest critics and gatekeepers. I think they feel threatened by our new ideas and alternative views

These post grads tried to resolve negative attitudes, ignore these or, 'look for the good':

I question things and if I think there is a misunderstanding I will try and get it clarified or resolved. Or ignore it if it is of no consequence

When someone makes a comment that has a negative connotation, I change it to my advantage by turning it to a positive thing... I have had belittling things said to me about x people, which really cut me up into pieces and that was the turning point for me to reach up to the sky

5. Advice - learning to say 'no' and 'help'

Many said 'Do it! This piece of paper is essential for your work/ for you/ our futures' But they also said 'Are you sure it's what you want to do. Don't just go this because your family want you to?'

The personal reasons and goals for doing postgrad are important to establish first. If you are not mentally ready for post grad study then do not do it. As you will have to say NO to many things.

Be honest with yourself in terms of is the postgraduate study for you?

Believe in yourself - we are just as good as others.

Set a vision. Say to yourself, What is the vision, what is the cause of that vision. Set the goal and go for it.

Be proactive in your research, not just an observer. You will need to be Self directed...

Views were that priority should be given to making sure finances were secure (or as secure as these can be!) and that supports were in place (family, friends, mentors and other students)

Postgraduate study is a time when you need more people and help than ever I found I had to ask and seek help and advice from different people. Different opinions and perspectives I found most helpful. .. PI students need robust support in knowing where to get help from and who to go to. Guidance and advice from supervisor is vital and keeping to timelines.

Family ... bring them into your circle of support.. What you need to do, and what they need to do... so you can step away to do what you need to do without sabotage or the 'guilts'.

Surround yourself with supportive family and friends and good mentors.

This is not something you can do on your own... I could never have done this without the practical support of my family – husband who minded children in the weekends so I could work, parents who baby sat for me

Form a good support network particularly with students at the same stage ... can make all the difference (can be lonely at times)

Sometimes, they said, 'women must learn to prioritise themselves':

I was very assertive, determined and single minded. I said 'No' all the time. I said 'I need help' all the time. I see my other female sisters not able to say either 'no' or 'help'. It makes me sad, because right now they are still not finished and they are just as smart and diligent and determined as I am... They deserve the degree just as much. It's not easy.

Study related challenges:

Study related advice included using the students services, time management, choice of supervisors and, keeping references up to date because this 'saves lots of time and heartache at the end'

Learn what the uni provides and use them

When you are tired stop work and start again when you are feeling more refreshed... Take a power nap. Does wonders.

Time management is crucial... but always be flexible and have plan b & c in hand.

6 Why do you think females are doing better in tertiary study than males?

Responses to this question reinforced perceptions about what characteristics they saw as motivating their own study and drew responses such as we are used to multi-tasking, women are natural survivors in adversity, women don't give in and, 'women know what we have to do'. Again, responses focussed on personal/ family related factors and study related factors.

Views were that families held greater expectations for females than males:

We seem to have a greater tendency to be accountable to our families... We have higher expectations placed upon us than our male siblings in the pursuit of academic knowledge and qualifications.

Our costs are so high, we have to deliver... that sense of responsibility.

Females know what they want from life. Females know how the family works. Females are selfless when it comes to protection of their offspring and academic achievement is a form of protection.

Females can multi-task, organise and utilise time from experiences of looking after the family as a young girl

Females have more family oriented obligations and related goals. Therefore the commitment level and onus to do well is very high...

The changes in gender roles and expectations, with women becoming the breadwinners, were seen as another factor women might be achieving better educationally:

Maybe Pacific men are 'heads' of families or breadwinners, pressure is placed on them to work and contribute money to families ... may be a reason for studies not completed or not doing so well as females.

Dynamics have changed... There are more PI females in tertiary education now as the need to be better qualified and compete for jobs that will support the family becomes more pertinent.

More and more of us are becoming the main income earners and this has been one of the ways forward in terms of improving ourselves and our income levels for our families...many of us are influencing the wealth and health of our families more positively through engagement with tertiary learning.

The opening up of sports opportunities for males was also referred to:

Men are 'going into sports and in particular rugby, and the professional nature of the sport lures Pacific males into earning big money and sacrificing their studies to pursue rugby careers...

Study related factors

Views were that women were better at asking for support. While males 'go it alone'.

Females tend to talk, share thoughts and discussion things a lot and together and seek help.

Less peer pressure, no ego problems

In addition, there were so many influential female role models but fewer for males.

(my guess) if there are more female lecturers, Pacific females may be doing better as they can identify better with women lecturers than males.

It is exciting to watch the leadership and influence that Pacific women have in the tertiary sector, more and more diverse levels now. While there are still too few, the ones who have entered into this realm make a significant mark.

(Pacific women) are very visible at academic conferences, research discussions and other forum, as well as more and more women leading the thinking and the talking in these realms.

SUPPORTING PACIFIC WOMEN POST GRADUATES

The very small numbers of Pacific women post graduates are isolated physically and academically. What is more, they may be placed with supervisors who have little understanding of 'where we are coming from' or understanding of women's multiple responsibilities. Funding and financial assistance aside, the following are the ways NZFUW members could support Pacific women post graduates here in New Zealand through their study and post study experiences. These are not prioritised.

Socially

To listen, to be part of a group – not isolated within a university... to listen to 'great debate'

For example, members of the Palmerston North branch of Pacifica Inc make a point of identifying Pacific students and making them feel at home – 'it's the little things that help' and we all know that 'social and academic learning go hand in hand'.

Mentoring through study:

Assistance through the stages of writing thesis for example and organising data. Editing and bouncing ideas

Branches could link in to local universities – through the Pacific Liaison officer and 'adopt' a Pacific post graduate, invite them to a meeting and ask if they would like a mentor

Publishing, support with preparation of conference papers

Helping post grads keep using their academic skills after they leave university. To keep their minds 'thinking' academically.

ANNEX PACIFIC TERTIARY PARTICIPATION 2007

Table 1: Enrolments by Pasifika ethnicity

| Ethnicity | Pasifika enrolments - 2007 - % | Pasifika enrolments - Change 06-07 - % | Pasifika enrolments - Proportion of total - % | Proportion of the NZ population |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Samoans | 13,200 | 8.7 | 45.1 | 2.6 |
| Cook Islanders | 5,840 | 3.4 | 19.9 | 1.1 |
| Tongans | 4,850 | 14.2 | 16.6 | 0.9 |
| Fijians | 3,190 | 8.1 | 10.9 | 0.2 |
| Nueans | 2,110 | 7.8 | 7.2 | 0.4 |
| Other Pasifika | 1,080 | 6.4 | 3.7 | 0.2 |
| Tokelauans | 758 | 7.2 | 2.6 | 0.1 |
| Total Pasifika | 29,300 | 8.2 | 100 | 5.2 |

*Statistics New Zealand, 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings

By course of study, the majority (28%) are in management and commerce with 22% in society and culture. Education - which for many years had been a pattern for Pacific tertiary study was 7.5%

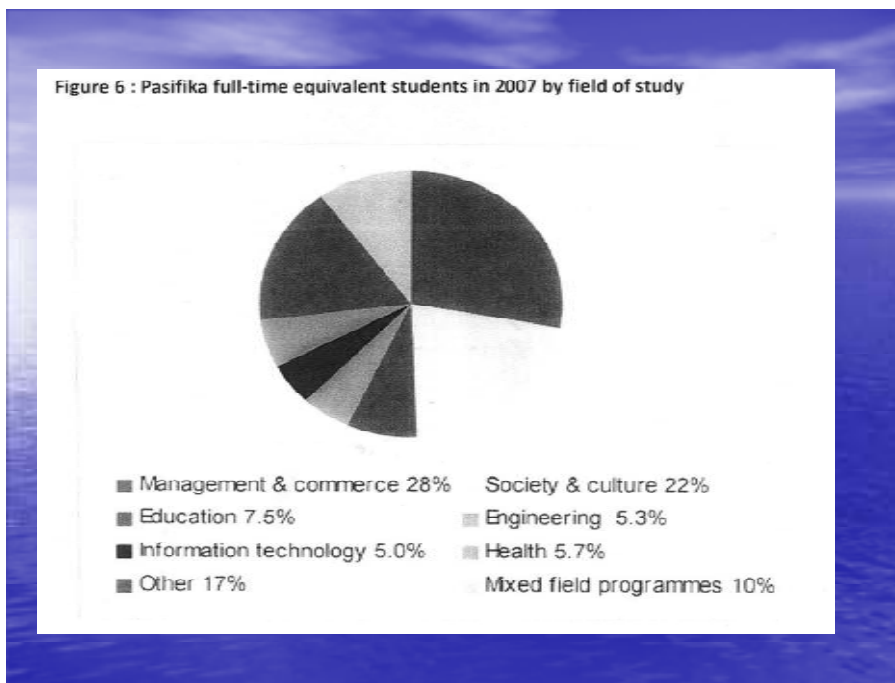


Figure 2: Annual percentage change in the number of Pasifika enrolments by gender

