

The Acting Vice Chancellor, council members, The University of Fiji academics, guests and students.

It is indeed an honour to be speaking to students who have just completed their high school and are now embarking on their university studies.

Making the transition from a school setting to a university environment can seem a bit overwhelming. I know, I was a uni student as recent as five years ago. One is faced with questions like, which studies to take up, which university to go on, fees affordability and other expenses.

You've made a great choice in coming here as UniFiji will help you make the best decisions for your tertiary education. So let's get to know UniFiji a bit:

- The University of Fiji was established by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji and has been in operation since 2005.
- It has two campuses: one and Suva and this Saweni campus
- UniFiji is has five academic schools;
 - o School of Business and Economics,
 - o School of Humanities and Arts,
 - o School of Law,
 - o School of Science and Technology
 - o Umanand Prasad School of Medicine & Health Sciences

and a Centre for iTaukei Studies.

What is unique about UniFiji is that it is a people's university – this campus is uniquely situated in a rural area and the University is constantly seeking to forge relationships with the people and communities around it. This enables addressing the needs of the people that are often overlooked by institutes situated in towns and cities.

UniFiji is very mindful of the high costs of living and education in the rural areas, hence you'll find the fees here are lower in comparison to other universities. This way UniFiji accords affordable education to students that may otherwise have been left out. The convenient location of the Saweni campus makes higher education accessible to all students in the west.

Quality of education is very important in Fiji due to the issues facing the country and it needs highly skilled and qualified people who will invest back into their country. This University acknowledges that tertiary education should not have restrictions within national borders but also has to prepare its students for the global environment. The University is developing to have a global academic presence and to be a globally-networked university. UniFiji is in full compliance with international best practices and standards to forge its relationship with the global community.

With such high standards, The University of Fiji an excellence agenda

- excellence in learning and teaching;
- excellence in research;
- student experience;
- partnerships;
- environment;

- and leadership and governance.

UniFiji is a young, dynamic and ever growing university. As part of the university you will have the opportunity to be part of exciting future developments at the university. For example, the establishment of Endowment Funds where partnerships will be formed with local and global donors, well-wishers, interested parties and stakeholders, including Arya Prathinidhi organisations in other countries for securing funds to support initiatives like:

- School of Graduate Studies – good news for those of you intending to do future studies after your bachelors. This will also enable the UniFiji to engage with the surrounding communities for attending to their scientific and technological needs, directing research in these communities and offering a second chance to those missed out on higher education.
- University Hospital – will offer the unique combination of assisting teaching and learning of medical students as well as providing superior medical facilities to the people of the west
- Institute of Hindi language and Cultural Studies. The modern era of mobile phones and other technologies is seeing the rapid loss of culture, traditions and language and keeping them alive is a great challenge. The University already as Centre for iTaukei Studies and this new institute for Hindi language will complement its work.
- Institute of Human Rights Research (IHRR) - a first for the Pacific region, this institute will enable the deeper understanding of human rights norms and the rigorous exchange of ideas required to influence both practical human rights changes and new approaches to policy.

All these will serve to make The University of Fiji to be the intellectual and cultural centre of the west, of which you all will be a central part.

The university has already produced graduates who are making differences in varied fields not only locally but in other countries as well. These graduates are both local and other pacific countries.

As students of this university, not only you will have the opportunity to get a world class education but also learn from the cultural diversity that students and teachers from different backgrounds bring to the university culture. UniFiji has seven professors amongst it teaching staff which is more than any other university in Fiji. This indicates the high calibre of teaching at UniFiji.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that you are now on your journey to becoming adults. This process involves moving from away from dependence to being independent. You will wean yourself from being dependent on your parents and guardians to relying on yourself more and more. You will meet peers and form relationships based on mutual interests. Some of these friendships will last long after you have graduated. This self-development process that you will undergo during your university studies will serve to prepare you for the real world out there. I encourage you all to get outside the realm of whichever course you have doing and explore other intellectual and social experiences available in the university setting. Join clubs of your interest – start one if one that interests you doesn't exist. Get involved in community work. While still at uni, see if you can get some work exposure in the fields you are interested to work in.

Develop an intellectual curiosity and fervour for independent learning. Train yourself to find solutions for your problems. Seek advice and guidance from others but you be in the driver's seat of your life. Be open to all experiences but choose what is best for you.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blow about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any”.

I hope you enjoy and learn from the rest of your tour of the university and looking forward to you all joining The University of Fiji.

Thank you.