

New study describes what helps and hinders Maori university success

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Dr Reremoana (Moana) Theodore. Credit: University of Otago

Māori university graduates describe whānau (family) support as the top factor that helped them to complete their qualifications, while family responsibilities and commitments made completion of their studies more difficult, according to research from the University of Otago's National Centre for Lifecourse Research (NCLR).

The findings are from the Graduate Longitudinal Study New Zealand (GLSNZ), an ongoing project that, over a 10-year period, will investigate the employment, health and social outcomes of more than 8,700 graduates from all eight New Zealand universities.

As part of the online survey conducted in 2011, when the study participants were in their final year of study, researchers asked participants what they found helpful or challenging to the completion of

their qualifications. The new research, published in *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, focuses on the responses of more than 600 Māori participants.

"Māori higher education success is of national importance; it is a government priority that Māori succeed at [higher levels](#) in tertiary education," says lead author and NCLR Co-Director, Dr Reremoana (Moana) Theodore. "Māori graduates are crucial for the social and economic well-being of Māori whānau and communities. Describing their experiences can provide a blueprint for future success by building an evidence base around factors that promote higher educational achievement for Māori."

The study found that families provided graduates with practical (e.g. accommodation) and emotional [support](#). Graduates were also motivated by their desire to build a better life for their children and their families. GLSNZ Director Dr Karen Tustin says their findings align with international research. "Studies show that a key driver of success for indigenous students is the desire to help others, give back to their community, and be role models for educational success."

In addition to family support, Māori graduates described other external (e.g. financial), institutional (e.g. academic support), and personal (e.g. determination) helping factors. Relationships between students and staff who were knowledgeable, approachable, and respectful, and who fostered warm and welcoming environments, were key. Māori graduates also described the importance of support services and support staff including Māori-led support programmes, networks, student associations, admission schemes and tutorials.

Approximately one third of the Māori graduates were parents. In terms of hindering factors, the study found that balancing multiple obligations including caregiving, study, and work placed Māori students and their

families under considerable pressure. Other hindering factors included personal factors (such as being underprepared for university study), health issues, and financial pressures. Institutional factors, such as the need to provide better support (e.g. improved course advice) and increase the amount of culturally-appropriate and relevant curricula, were also identified.

"To support Māori to succeed at higher levels in tertiary education, ongoing work is required to reduce and remove existing barriers to their university completion," says Dr Theodore. "In particular, the need to work with whānau to support student participation and achievement is important."

Provided by University of Otago

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