

BACHELOR'S PROGRAM IN

By John Udarbe

One cannot fully appreciate the total impact of a project such as the American Samoa Bachelor Degree Program unless a vicarious transfer is made to a South Pacific island. Here the place of employment is the Department of Education, the language of instruction is foreign, institutions of higher learning are limited, and time, money, distance and personal circumstances become insurmountable barriers toward advanced education. The desire for completing a baccalaureate degree is constantly being frustrated. Such were the conditions many teachers found themselves in while performing their services in American Samoa. The situation, however, acted as a catalyst to bring about a request in August 1975, from the Department of Education to the Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus for an in-country bachelor degree program. The university responded after an initial investigation, with a plan to provide three academic majors in combination with a strong English core. The majors represented the fields of business, mathematics and social science.

Putting the American Samoa Program into operation introduced a three-fold procedure. Teacher participants, first of all, were guided through carefully selected reading assignments prepared in syllabus form by members of the BYU—Hawaii faculty. Assignments were handled by correspondence and close contact



A group of the members pose outside the classroom.

was maintained throughout this phase. The second step called for BYU—Hawaii faculty to be in-country, offering concentrated workshop-type sessions. During this time participants engaged in activities within their respective groups, received individual attention and had the opportunity to have



At right, Dr. Udarbe and Puka Pasi have a conference.

Below: Robert Goodwin, Sili A



AMERICAN SAMOA



professors visit their classrooms. The total experience was then synthesized in the third and final step when theory was related to classroom practice. Evaluation also occupied an important part of this last phase. The overall operation became a learning laboratory with problems and solutions given concerted attention. For example, when professors were not on-site, an in-country support team strengthened the program (Department of Education personnel voluntarily assisted).

Many personal sacrifices were made during the American Samoa Bachelor Degree Program, and John Udarbe plan the program.



ram. Teacher participants often found themselves at the end of a teaching day beginning all over an exhaustive schedule leading into the late night hours. Weekends, holidays and even summer vacations were almost totally occupied in filling assignments, completing projects and meeting deadlines. Families were also affected. One teacher remarked, "My children rarely see me because I go to the library to study. Everyone has had more responsibility for the home duties."

Program participants registered strong positive attitudes both in comments and in an evaluative survey. One teacher observed, "All of us are working tremendously hard but there has come to the group a greater closeness! We encourage each other. If one is discouraged or falling behind on assignments, we are there to push him on and give the needed encouragement." In the survey, designed to elicit the response of participants on how effective the various program activities were in increasing teacher proficiency, eighty-one per cent felt that the different aspects of the program were very effective to extremely effective in gaining greater proficiency in subject matter areas; seventy-seven per cent indicated a better understanding of English*; seventy-six per cent believed they were better prepared in the use of newer teaching methods; seventy-four per cent expressed a desire for continued professional growth; seventy-one per cent had a better appreciation of how their particular subject related to careers; and sixty-eight per cent signified greater skill in developing classroom materials. The survey included a section of open-ended statements requesting participants to list new proficiencies. Responses most often made were: "more confidence in myself to teach a particular subject," "greater ability to communicate through speaking and writing," "sharper skills in reading and listening," "better student response in classroom discussions," and "higher scores on examinations." Overwhelmingly, the response was for more time and the request was to "keep the program going." (continued on page 14)

*Since the survey was taken, two-thirds of the participants completing classes have taken two intensive English classes--one in reading and one in writing

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Editor Alice C. Pack

Staff William Gallagher

Greg Larkin

Ron Safsten

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SAMOA

(continued from p. 9)

There is an over used cliché in education which states, "Teachers should meet students where they are and take them to where they ain't." The American Samoa Bachelor Degree Program has in a sense accomplished that—both geographically and academically. Participant American Samoa teachers have been able to continue residing in their Pacific locale, and have had the opportunity to advance toward a baccalaureate degree. (For many, this has been a life-time dream.) As one participant concluded, "I have been trying to finish my degree for years and had finally given up hope of ever doing so. If it had not been for this program, my desire would have never been realized."

FROM:

To: Dr. Greg Larkin

Campus Box 135

Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus

Laie, Hawaii 96762





Dr. Greg Larkin conducts an outdoor session with Undergraduate Students
in the American Samoa Program.
(See p. 8)

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