

# DEVELOPING LOCAL TALENT

## MS ITT Program Helps Close the Digital Divide

By Sal Poloi

Technology has been building bridges in the Western Pacific, providing easy access to information and resources that were once hard to find. Pacific Islanders are fully aware that their communities have become interdependent with the rest of the "Global e-Village." The big question for educators in island communities like American Samoa is how to provide students with the advantages of educational technology without contributing to the erosion of indigenous cultures and languages. This delicate balance can only be obtained if indigenous people take leadership roles in developing the opportunities that have become available to our islands.

Recently, 29 educators from American Samoa and 8 other Pacific entities participated in a Master of Science in Instructional Technology and Telecommunications (MS ITT)

Photo: Sal Poloi



▷ Technology training provided by local MS ITT graduates will help develop the skills educators need to integrate and maintain technology in American Samoan classrooms.

program designed to help educators develop the expertise they will need to successfully integrate technology in island curricula. The program, which was developed by PREL and Western Illinois University, began in January 2001 and was delivered primarily through distance learning by PRELSTAR.

American Samoa was fortunate to have nine of its educators accepted into this program, thanks to support from Director of Education Sili Sataua and Governor Tauese Suniu. It wasn't easy for the students in the program, most of whom hold full-time positions with local education systems,

to tackle the demands of a master's degree program. However, 22 of the students completed their requirements in December 2002. On January 17, 2003, they were awarded degrees during a "virtual" graduation ceremony. Broadcast over the PEACESAT/PRELSTAR videoconferencing network, the proceedings spanned five sites in the Pacific and two in the continental U.S.

The eight individuals from American Samoa who completed the MS ITT program have become a close-knit group and are currently discussing how best to assist the American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE) in improving the use of technology to support student achievement. During their studies, the students agreed on the need to apply some of the skills and knowledge they were learning to help local teachers. A general email was sent to all teachers, principals, and the central office of the ASDOE offering free technology integration or basic computer skills training.

As a result of the responses, the group provided workshops and training on software, email, and Internet use at nine schools. Workshop topics included the following:

- setting up Web-based email accounts;
- creating bulletin boards;
- using effective search strategies;
- selecting software and integrating it into the curriculum;
- using multimedia to create documentary movies; and
- designing school webpages.

The students also offered training in software use for a cohort of teachers in a University of Hawai'i graduate program and developed courses on using PowerPoint and iMovie for high school students at the Pacific Educational Conference. In addition, they ran workshops for administrators in creating basic databases to compile student information.

By developing local expertise, the MS ITT program has helped provide local educators with the information they will need to make informed decisions on how best to use technology in their respective island communities as well as the capacity to turn those decisions into reality. As Pacific Islanders cross this threshold, we need to ensure that each child is provided ample opportunity to grow intellectually, physically, morally, and spiritually, and to become an avid participant in this global society. We are well aware of the importance of ensuring that our heritage and our cultural identity are not lost.

*Sal Poloi is the IT EdTech Manager for the American Samoa Department of Education. He is a graduate of the MS ITT program and was selected to speak for the class at the graduation.* ★