

Hawaiian scholars scoop top US fellowships to study at Waikato

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In a New Zealand first, two Native Hawaiian scholars have won top US awards to complete their PhD studies at the University of Waikato.

The prestigious Mellon-Hawai'i doctoral fellowships are supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Kamehameha Schools, and are each worth US\$40,000 (NZ\$56,000) for the 2010-11 academic year, starting in September.

It's the first time the fellowships have been awarded to students studying in New Zealand. Keao NeSmith is completing a PhD in applied linguistics, focussing on how the Hawaiian language is being conveyed to a new generation of Hawaiian speakers, while Noe Noe Wong-Wilson's doctoral research is looking at strategies for success for Native Hawaiians entering community colleges.

Both researchers will be based in the School of Maori and Pacific Development.

"I'm looking at the acquisition of Hawaiian as a second or additional language – especially in relation to those who've learnt it from classrooms and have little or no interaction with native speakers," says NeSmith, who's a Hawaiian language instructor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

"Today we often see a breakdown in communication between native speakers and second-language speakers of Hawaiian, including children taught by second-language speakers. It's a strong indicator that the form of the language is changing among second-language speakers. In order to understand what's happening with Hawaiian, I'm interested in how it's being learned."

NeSmith says he chose to do his PhD in New Zealand to further broaden his academic and professional experience and training, and to gain a more international view of academia and research methodologies. "I'm impressed with the value of the education I'm obtaining at Waikato. The professionalism of the training is truly world class."

NeSmith's academic supervisor at Waikato, Associate Professor Winifred Crombie, says competition for the awards is intense. "A few of these very prestigious fellowships are available to Native Hawaiian scholars each year, and the application process is a very complex one, so Keao has done well to



Hawaiian language: Keao NeSmith is completing a PhD in applied linguistics.

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