

In memoriam: Celebrating the life and work of Dr I'u Tuagalu

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Dr I'u Tuagalu died suddenly on 6th July 2025 surrounded by family; aged 62 years.

I'u's passing leaves a deep sadness at AUT, where he spent more than two decades supporting student success. His work was not only about academic skills; it was about connection, belonging, and creating space where students could thrive.

I'u understood the challenges faced by Pacific students in higher education in a way few others did. He was working on a project that explored Vā, the relational space central to Pacific worldviews, and its role in academic literacies. This work offered a new lens for understanding how Pacific students navigate university life, and it promised to change how educators engage with cultural frameworks in learning.

Another project he was working on, *Unfurling the Metaphor*, reflected his commitment to integrating Mātauranga Māori into academic writing and reflective practice.

His work on making the concept of attribution, that cornerstone of academic integrity, both tangible and meaningful was also thoughtful and rooted in Aotearoa. He described this as the whakapapa of ideas, showing in deeply personal and practical ways how our knowledge is built upon the contributions of others. Through this approach, students are taught that we must mihi the original thinkers, and this philosophy now shapes how we teach attribution and referencing to our students at AUT.

Beyond his scholarship, I'u was known for his generosity, humour, and kindness. He had a gift for making people feel like they had known him forever. Colleagues remember his laughter, his wit, and his ability to lighten even the most serious meetings.

Dr. Tuagalu's legacy is his work. It reminds us that learning at a tertiary level is about mastering the content, the literacies needed for success *and* navigating relationships, identity, and belonging. As we mourn his passing, we celebrate the impact he had on the lives of countless students, and we also remember the fun times we were lucky to have shared with him. Kua hinga te totara i te wao nui a Tāne.