

IRIS Report

During the Summer of 2024, I utilized my IRIS Area and International Studies Award for Incoming Graduate Students to engage in the Festival of the Pacific (FestPac) in Hawai'i alongside returning to my home island of *Guåhan* (Guam) to continue learning about my culture. Attending these two events were crucial in furthering my doctoral research goals which focus on celebrating the Pacific as a site filled with diverse knowledges given that contemporary conversations in both academic and public settings has shaped the Pacific as either a footnote or as just "tropical paradise." My research seeks to intervene on these narratives by focusing on the storytelling and embodied practices (including food preparation/consumption, weaving, painting, etc.) of people from the Pacific, particularly from my home island of Guam, to showcase their resilience as seafarers, crucial stops on trade routes, and survivors (or continued resisters) of colonization. Through listening to the stories and engaging with the embodied practices of people from the Pacific, the goal of my research is to showcase the Pacific as a site of cultural exchange which can be brought into educational spaces (in my case informing college writing pedagogy) to better account for the diverse experiences that students bring into the classroom and how to best engage across cultural differences. Attending FestPac and returning to Guam, then, gave me a space to further learn about the Pacific, the many cultures from all the islands, and my identity as a CHamoru person which I plan to emphasize in my research.

My research trip started with attending FestPac, a quadrennial event where almost all the Pacific Island Nations gather to engage in cultural preservation and exchange. This event includes cultural performances, a festival village, cultural arts exhibitions, alongside formal conference presentations. During my time at FestPac, I attended a majority of the different events on the

schedule. These events served as field work for my research by providing me with an opportunity to listen to stories and histories from all the islands in addition to participating in embodied practices that the various Island Nations wanted to share. Two events that were particularly helpful for my field work research was the opening ceremony and the cultural exchange mini conference. The opening ceremony provided a solid foundation for my research as I was able to get a brief introduction to each of the participating nations, where they shared some of the stories and histories of their island and culture, alongside experiences a sense of the shared affective components of Pacific culture which emanated through the cheering, chanting, and screaming. The cultural exchange mini conference served as the embodied practice focus of in my fieldwork as I was able to participate in dance (from Tahiti and Fiji), games (from Hawai'i and Samoa), and voyaging (boarding a French Polynesian *va'a*/canoe). These events, alongside the other events I attended, made FestPac a valuable part of my research trip as the opportunity to engage in this level of field work, where I was able to participate in the different practices from across the Pacific, could not be done anywhere but at this festival.

After the end of the conference, I returned to Guam with the goal of learning more about my culture and how I can further bring knowledge from my culture into my research. This trip was set up around an IRB approved study focused on conducting interviews with individuals in which they would share stories while participating in embodied practices (ex. Weaving) with myself. Doing this research most particularly helped me think through research design for the field work I want to do in the Pacific in the future as I saw ways that would be more conducive to conducting research. In particular, group settings (as opposed to the one-on-one interviews I proposed) would be a useful approach to my future research as I noticed when people were in community the

conversations had a different flow and offered greater depth of story as people would add onto each other's stories allowing for multiple perspectives to shape that oral history.

Having the opportunity to engage with such a powerful event in FestPac and return to Guam was an extreme privilege as I go into the second year of my doctoral program because these events have helped expand the foundation of knowledge I have regarding my research around the Pacific alongside opening up new avenues that help further expand my research to account for what I have learned. In particular, the experiences have opened me to supplemental research questions surrounding the celebration of Pacific cultures through considering how this celebration is (and must be) paired with addressing the urgent needs of these communities from dispossession and marginalization on their own land via colonization and militarization to thinking about how casual and communal settings might be more conducive to research in the Pacific. As I continue with this research, I plan to utilize what I learned from these experiences, particularly thinking about conceptualizing divisions/boundaries (via "the ocean connects rather than divides"), how cultural exchange happens (through individual and group settings), and how to bring knowledge from the Pacific to my research while ensuring I advocate for the immediate challenges they are facing. The opportunity to expand my research in this way would not have been possible without the support of the IRIS Area and International Studies Award for Incoming Graduate Students so *mahalo* (thank you in Hawaiian) and *si yu'us ma'ase* (thank you in CHamoru) for the support in allowing me to explore the Pacific and share this research in my work and the UW-Madison community.

Pictures from Field Work



Tonga's (bark cloth) gift to Hawai'i for hosting (Opening Ceremony)



Visiting historical sites in Guam



A va'a similar to the one I boarded