

University of Michigan 2026

# Oceania Student Celebration

**Weaving the Future:**  
A new generation that  
upkeeps roots

## Theme Statement

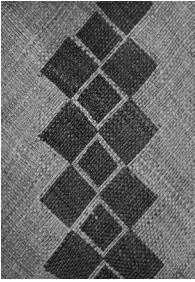
### *Weaving the Future* *A new generation that upkeeps roots*

Weaving the future embodies interlocking legacies that were passed down to us and to the future yet to come. Across Pasifika cultures, we all display forms of weaving. Whether people weave baskets/ato, hats for shade, strands of lei, or materials for mats, it signifies a connection of materials and intention. It is a tribute to the values of our ancestors that guide us forward today while combining them with contemporary ways of celebration and the continuation of our cultures.

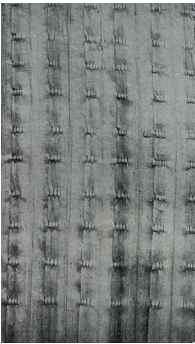
## Booklet Artist



**Mokihana Paik** is a graduating senior at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design. She is a native Hawaiian graphic designer and artist dedicated to uplifting Hawaiian culture through education and storytelling.



Makaloa Mat from Hawaii



Pandanus Mat from Ebon



Basket from Tonga

Hawaiian Mat and Basket Weaving, and Nets, and Netting.  
From the Bishop Museum Press 1906

# Celebration Welcome Letter

Greetings,

Congratulations to the Graduating Class of 2026 and the participants of this year's Oceania Student Celebration.

Commencement is a meaningful milestone for the University of Michigan community. It is a time to recognize your achievements, your growth, and the communities that supported you along the way. Today, we celebrate all that you have accomplished and the presence you have carried throughout your time here.

This year's theme, "Weaving the Future," reflects the spirit of the Class of 2026. It speaks to the ways your journeys are shaped by what has been passed down to you and what you continue to build. Your experiences, identities, and communities are interconnected, each thread carrying meaning and intention.

You have contributed to a campus that is stronger because of your presence. You created spaces of belonging, shared culture and knowledge, and supported one another through moments of challenge and growth. You brought care, creativity, and purpose into the communities you were part of.

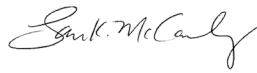
We honor your achievements in every form, from the milestones that are recognized publicly to the quiet moments of persistence, reflection, and determination that shaped your path. Each thread of your journey adds to a larger story that continues to unfold.

Your impact will continue to be felt in the spaces you have shaped and in the futures you help create.

We celebrate you and all that is ahead.  
Wherever you go from here - Always Go Blue!



**Domenico Grasso**  
President



**Laurie K. McCauley**  
Provost & Executive Vice President  
for Academic Affairs



**Martino Harmon**  
Vice President for Student Life



**Angela D. Dillard**  
Interim Vice Provost for Access &  
Opportunity and Vice Provost for  
Undergraduate Education

# OAMI's Expression of Gratitude

Dear Graduates,

It is a true honor to celebrate with you all at this year's Oceania Student Celebration at the University of Michigan.

This year's theme, Weaving the Future, reflects something both deeply ancestral and forward-moving. Across Pasifika cultures, weaving carries connection, intention, and meaning. Each strand carries a story. It is a reminder that what we build is never done alone; it is shaped by the hands, values, and traditions passed down to us.

In many ways, your journey here mirrors that same process. You have drawn from your communities, your histories, and your identities to create something shared during your time at Michigan. You have built spaces of belonging that have manifested itself into a campus community that is vibrant, thoughtful, and connected.

As you move forward, you carry both legacy and possibility. You honor those who came before you while weaving new futures, ones that reflect your vision, your leadership, and your commitment to community. That balance, between tradition and transformation, is powerful.

Today, we celebrate all that you have woven into this place, the relationships you've built, the impact you've made, and the paths you've opened for others. We are deeply proud of you and excited for all that lies ahead— we know you will be great.

With pride and admiration,

**The Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives**

# **Order of Program**

## **OPENING**

Jalen Iereneo & Lopaka O'Connor  
*Masters of Ceremonies*

## **LAND & LABOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Jalen Iereneo

## **WELCOME**

Dr. Angela D. Dillard  
*Interim Vice Provost for Access & Opportunity  
and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education*

## **REMARKS FOR GRADUATES**

Dr. Susan Najita  
*Associate Professor, English, American Culture, LSA*

## **KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

Dr. Sela Panapasa  
*Associate Research Scientist  
Research Center for Group Dynamics (RCGD)  
Institute for Social Research*

## **CLASS RECOGNITION**

## **CLOSING**

Keale Chang  
*Junior, Aerospace Engineering*

## Masters of Ceremonies



### Jalen Iereneo

Jalen T. Iereneo is a graduate student in the Master of Movement Science program at the University of Michigan and serves as a Graduate Intern with the Center for Campus Involvement, where he develops programming to strengthen student organization leadership and effectiveness.

He earned his undergraduate degree in Chemistry from Kalamazoo College as a Posse Foundation Scholar. He held key mentorship and leadership roles, including serving as a First-Year Experience Mentor and a Leadership for Social Change Intern. He also served as President of Young Men of Color (YMC) student organization, where he led weekly meetings and organized campus-wide events, advancing a mission centered on unity, holistic well-being, leadership / professional development, and empowerment for men of color on campus.



### Lopaka O'Connor

Lopaka is a historian of property formation in the Pacific across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His dissertation project centers on the archives of applied anthropology in the US-administered, UN-sanctioned Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. One hand, these archives document

the history of negotiating property around (thermo) nuclear “test” sites and sites of exile from c. 1940-1980. On the other, they demonstrate the longue durée history of how the nineteenth-century copra plantation shaped the geography of US nuclear colonialism beginning in the mid-twentieth century. Lopaka has published in the *Journal of Pacific History* on Refaluwasch migrations to and from Guahan during the late nineteenth century. He has also researched the intersections of incarceration, counterinsurgency, and colonial state-building during the US occupation of the Philippines (1898-c. 1910).

## Welcome Speaker



### **Dr. Angela D. Dillard**

*Interim Vice Provost for Access & Opportunity and Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education*

Angela D. Dillard is the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and the Interim Vice Provost for Access & Opportunity at the University of Michigan; former chair of the Department of History in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA); and the Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican & African Studies and History. She also maintains affiliated faculty status within the Residential College, where she is a member of the Social Theory & Practice program.

Dillard is an interdisciplinary scholar trained in history and political theory with a Ph.D. in American Studies, from the U-M's Department of American Culture. She specializes in American and African-American intellectual history, particularly around issues of race, religion, and politics — on both the Left and the Right sides of the political spectrum.

## Remarks for Graduates



### **Dr. Susan Najita**

*Associate Professor, English, American Culture, LSA*

Susan Najita is a third-generation local of Japanese ancestry, born and raised in Hawai'i. She has worked at the University of Michigan since 2001, where she has had the pleasure of conducting research and teaching courses on Pacific Island literatures. Her current book on the history and cultural significance of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park will be appearing this fall with the University of California Press.

## Keynote Speaker



### **Dr. Sela Panapasa**

*Associate Research Scientist*

*Research Center for Group Dynamics (RCGD)*

*Institute for Social Research*

Dr. Sela Panapasa serves as an Associate Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, which is recognized as the largest academic organization devoted to social science and survey research globally. With a specialization in social demography, she has dedicated the past thirty years to conducting research aimed at enhancing federal statistics and promoting health equity for underrepresented populations, particularly focusing on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in the United States, its territories, the Compact of Free Association States, and the Pacific Island Nations. Her research focuses on the role that socio-demographic change plays in the health and well-being of island populations across the life course. Dr. Panapasa also mentors undergraduate and graduate students, contributes to master's and doctoral thesis committees, publishes in peer-reviewed journals, has received multiple grants from federal agencies and foundations, and holds positions on various federal and scientific advisory committees. She received her PhD from Brown University and has ancestral connections to Rotuma in Fiji, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

## Closing Speaker



### **Keale Chang**

*Junior, Aerospace Engineering*

Keale Chang is a junior studying Aerospace Engineering at the University of Michigan. He was born on O‘ahu and raised on Maui, Hawai‘i. At Michigan, he’s been involved with Hawai‘i Club as an event planner and this year’s lū‘au co-chair, helping bring people together and share a bit of home on campus.

# Congratulations to the Class of 2026!



## Master's Graduates



Charles Ka Ua 'Ō'ili'ili Maka Akua Taylor-Fulton  
Wai'ānae, Hawaii (Oahu)  
School of Social Work  
*Master of Social Work*

Aloha pākahi a pau. My name is Charles Theodore Ka Ua 'Ō'ili'ili Maka Akua Taylor-Fulton, and I am from Wai'ānae. I am a graduating student at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, honored to celebrate this milestone at the Oceania Graduation. As a proud Pacific Islander and first-generation college student, my journey has been grounded in community, reciprocity, and the values passed down through generations. My experiences at Michigan have deepened my commitment to serving and uplifting our island communities through culturally rooted, relationship-centered work. I carry forward an oceanic perspective that recognizes our interconnectedness, resilience, and responsibility to one another as we navigate the future, paving the way for the generations to come. “‘Aali'i kū makani mai au; 'āohe makani nānā e kulá'i” (Pukui, 1983).

# Bachelor's Graduates



**Kaia Keala Courtney Tolu**

Michigan

College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

*Media & Communication Studies*

Kaia Keala Courtney Tolu is graduating with a B.A. in Communication and Media Studies with a concentration in Journalism. Whether through film, creative direction, and/or entrepreneurship, she is guided by a desire to work in capacities that enact positive change with grit and uniqueness.

Her family and faith have undoubtedly carried her through this journey. She holds deep gratitude for their constant support. Kaia is excited to navigate her various eras while remaining rooted in the idea of leaving every place better than she found it. To the Oceania Student Association: fa'afetai for all the lifelong relationships, growth, and memories. Love you all.



**Leanna Mokihana Paik**

Kāneʻohe, Hawaii (Oahu)

Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design

*Art and Design*

Mokihana Paik is a native Hawaiian graphic designer and artist dedicated to uplifting Hawaiian culture through education and storytelling. As a graduating senior at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art and Design, she challenged herself by working closely with professors and mentors to grow as a creative. Mokihana looks forward to returning to Hawai'i and working alongside the community to create meaningful, culturally grounded projects.

# Bachelor's Graduates



**Samantha Nicole Lorzano**

Yigo, Guam

College of Engineering

*Mechanical Engineering*

Samantha Nicole Lorzano is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. Throughout her journey, she has been guided by curiosity, resilience, and a passion for solving meaningful problems and making a positive impact.

She is endlessly grateful to her family, whose unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in her have carried her through every challenge and milestone. Their support has been her greatest strength, and she looks forward to everything ahead with them by her side.

## About the Committee

The Oceania Student Celebration Committee is composed of Oceania Student Association members and a staff member from the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives. This year, the committee came together to collaborate on meaningful ways to honor and celebrate students of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander heritage.

If you are interested in joining the committee in the future, please contact Julia Barron at [Juliajb@umich.edu](mailto:Juliajb@umich.edu).

### Maekayla Dimatulac

*Junior, Sociology*

Spaces like this don't happen by accident; they're built with intention, care, and a shared commitment to community. At a place like the University of Michigan, that effort carries even more weight, and it means a lot to see it come to life in this way.

I want to express my gratitude to the Oceania Student Celebration Committee, Kaia, and Julia, as well as OAMI, for working alongside to make this possible. This event represents more than just a moment of gathering, but it reflects the care, intention, and shared commitment behind it. I feel incredibly honored to have helped create something meaningful for the people and community I hold close. My hope is that this celebration continues to inspire connection, pride, and belonging for years to come! Cheee, major congratulations to all graduates!

### Kaia Keala Courtney Tolu

*Senior, Media & Communication Studies*

Working with the committee has been an enlightening experience. At the core of planning the celebration is our love for community, which is mirrored in every shared laugh and every lei gifted. This student celebration weaves together voices to talk story and honor achievements that will feed a legacy of excellence. Our committee prioritized intentional connection from our theme to graphics (alongside countless decisions). We hope it sets models for how representation can facilitate long-lasting impacts in academia and beyond. To all those who are weaving the future: we look forward to the beautiful paths you will forge. Congratulations!

## Oceania Student Celebration Mission

The Oceania Student Celebration honors the histories, identities, and contributions of Pasifika student communities at the University of Michigan while welcoming all participants who choose to engage in the celebration. It recognizes the richness of Pasifika experiences and celebrates the accomplishments of participating students.

The celebration also acknowledges faculty and staff who contribute to student success through academic enrichment, research, and community-building efforts. Through this celebration, the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives (OAMI), in partnership with the Oceania Student Planning Committee, affirms its commitment to creating spaces that are culturally grounded and open to all. The event is open to all students and members of the university community who wish to participate, engage, and celebrate in this space.

## Oceania Student Celebration History

The annual Oceania Student Celebration (OSC) honors, uplifts, and makes visible the accomplishments of graduating students while centering Pasifika students. Prior to the creation of the OSC, Pasifika graduates were recognized within the broader Asian and Pacific Islander Student Celebration. Over time, students, alongside partners in the Department of Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies and Native Studies, advocated for recognition of NH/PI identities as Indigenous peoples with distinct histories, cultures, and lived experiences.

This advocacy led to the establishment of a celebration that centers Pasifika identity, community, and cultural expression. The 2025 Oceania Student Celebration marked the first Pasifika-centered celebration at the University of Michigan. While the celebration highlights NH/PI experiences, it is open to all students and members of the university community who wish to participate in and celebrate this space.

The Oceania Student Celebration is planned in collaboration with the Oceania Student Association Student Committee, ensuring it remains grounded in the communities and experiences it highlights.

## Land and Labor Acknowledgment

The University of Michigan is located on the territory of the Anishinaabeg people. The Ann Arbor campus resides on land ceded through the Treaty of Detroit in 1807. Additionally, in 1817, the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodewadami Nations made the largest single land transfer to the University of Michigan, ceded through the Treaty of Fort Meigs, with the agreement that their children would be educated in perpetuity.

We assert the sovereignty of tribal lands and acknowledge the painful historical and ongoing genocide, forced assimilation, and displacement of Native communities in establishing the university.

We affirm contemporary and ancestral Anishinaabeg ties to this land, the profound contributions of Native American peoples to this institution, and the University's commitment to educating the children of Native ancestors.

We further recognize that whether you are on campus in Ann Arbor or elsewhere in the United States, we stand on land developed at the often-fatal expense of forcefully enslaved Black people. We acknowledge that much of this country, including its culture, economic growth, and development has been made possible by the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants who suffered the horror of the transatlantic trafficking, chattel slavery, and dehumanization through segregation and Jim Crow laws.

We remember those who did not survive the Middle Passage, those who were beaten and lynched, and those who are still suffering while fighting for their freedom. We are indebted to their labor and unwilling sacrifice, and acknowledge the violence throughout the generations and the resulting impact and generational trauma still felt today.

The fights against settler colonialism and anti-blackness will always be inextricably linked. To the land, to the collective, and to the ancestors, we thank you, we thank you, we thank you.

## Statement of Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

The University of Michigan strives to create an open forum in which diverse opinions can be expressed and heard. Members of the University community, speakers, artists, and other invited guests have a right to express their views and opinions, and the University will protect that right. The University also supports the rights of those with differing views to express their opinions. In the interest of protecting these rights for all, speech that breaks the law, violates the University of Michigan's code of conduct, or threatens harm to another person will not be tolerated. Persons engaging in such speech may be warned by University representatives, and if the warnings are not heeded, may be removed from the building. The policy extends and affirms University policies set forth by our Civil Liberties Board in our Student Handbook; and in the U-M Standard Practice Guide; Regents Ordinance Article XII, Section 1; and state statutes.

## Nondiscrimination Policy Statement

The University of Michigan, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin, or ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, and admissions. Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the Senior Director for the Office of Equity, Civil Rights and Title IX/Section 504 Coordinator, Office of Equity, Civil Rights and Title IX at 2072 Administrative Services Building, 1009 Greene Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109, 734-763-0235

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Domenico Grasso, *ex officio*, President

# OAMI Student Celebrations

OAMI Student Celebrations take place during graduation season to honor the achievements, shared experiences, and diverse backgrounds that shape our students' journeys.

All of OAMI's celebrations are open to all students at the University of Michigan, recognizing and honoring the diverse experiences and identities within our community.

## Celebration Symbols

These symbols are used by OAMI and the organizing committees to represent the eight student celebrations:



**Native Student Celebration**  
**La Celebración Latina**

**Black Celebratory**  
**Asian Student Celebration**  
**Oceania Student Celebration**  
**Middle Eastern & North African Student Celebration**

**First-Generation Student Celebration**  
**Undocumented Student Celebration**



**OFFICE OF ACADEMIC MULTICULTURAL INITIATIVES**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN