Halaevalu F. Ofahengaue Vakalahi, MSW, PhD, Dean and Professor

Halaevalu is a Pacific Islander woman born in Tonga and raised in Hawai’i, a proud alum of La’ie Elementary and Kahuku High School. She is currently a Professor and Dean of the College of Health and Society at Hawai’i Pacific University (HPU) with kuleana over Public Health, Social Work, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physician Assistant, and previously Nursing.

Halaevalu brings to the table qualities, talents, and skills of an inclusive and visionary leader who is prepared to build on the existing successes of the Thompson School and larger University with a focus on the future. She has been blessed in depth and breadth with 24+ years of academic experience in six university systems, from a Predominantly White Institution to Hispanic/Minority serving Institutions to a Historically Black College/University (HBCU), the Council on Social Work Education, and communities in which she has lived. She brings current, relevant, and transferrable experiences in leadership and administration, accreditation and program development across disciplines, a national and international reputation for scholarship and research on women of color in academia and Pacific Islander families and communities, and a track record of excellence in teaching and mentoring particularly those from underrepresented communities into higher education. Her grounding in community and educational background earning a B.S. in Business Management (BYU-Hawaii), MSW (UH-Manoa), M.Ed. and PhD in Social Work (University of Utah), have informed her leadership, scholarship, teaching, and service as well as offered clarity to her purpose in the academy and her commitment to forward social and economic justice in some small way.

As a Dean, Halaevalu has placed a strong emphasis on the alignment of core values and goals, objectives, and activities. She has engaged community talents and wisdom through her college Advisory Board and involvement in the NHPI 3R Team in response to COVID as well as contributes to her profession as Vice Chair of the CSWE Board of Directors. To nurture a healthy organizational culture, she supports faculty through recognition, resources, and training. Collaboratively, she led the development of a new college vision, mission, strategic plan, faculty promotion and reappointment criteria, and growth plans that leverage online education.

Most rewarding for Halaevalu has been the opportunity to intentionally mentor and systematically facilitate the growth and advancement of future scholar-educators, including those of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander heritage, which culminated into a co-authored published book “Mentoring Women for Leadership: Empowering the Next Generation” (2021). Additionally, with colleagues they co-founded Urban Social Work, a new peer-reviewed journal by Springer Publishing, intended to create a platform for innovation and new voices. Furthermore, she is the PI on an NIH grant that has created the HUI Student Research Center to mentor students in undergraduate research, preparation for graduate school, and entrance into a career in the biomedical and health sciences. To support faculty in mentoring these students, she is also the PI on an NIH administrative supplement grant to train faculty mentors. To nurture and mentor local women through degree completion and returning to community, she also partnered with Papa Ola Lokahi to establish the Mana Wahine Fellowship program. Several years ago, she was honored to receive the CSWE Women’s Council Feminist Scholar Award and Morgan State University Iva G Jones Award which she hopes is an acknowledgement of her deep commitment to women’s issues and diversity, equity, inclusion, and access as tools to positively impact family and community well-being and thus, bettering our world.