Finding Our Place

Non-Christians Seeking Relevance on a Christian Campus

by Benjamin Irwin

Everyone has an experience of history with spirituality, at different times experiencing as faith, love, hate, embrace, rejection, trust, betrayal, and abandonment. My own history of these experiences is something that I have been reflecting on, and I have seen them as being quite revealing. I have been involved in a number of different churches, and have seen this pattern repeated. I believe that this pattern of spiritual experience is something that we all have in common.

After high school, I attended a university in Virginia. This was one of the largest Christian universities in the world, and was founded by highly controversial Southern Baptists. I was involved in a number of different student organizations, and I have seen this pattern repeated. I believe that this pattern of spiritual experience is something that we all have in common.

After high school, I decided to attend a university in Virginia. This was one of the largest Christian universities in the world, and was founded by highly controversial Southern Baptists. I was involved in a number of different student organizations, and I have seen this pattern repeated. I believe that this pattern of spiritual experience is something that we all have in common.

In the Knight Times online survey of 76 students, 45 percent said that the college education is the best way to learn about diversity. Over 35 percent of students who answered the poll believe that Warfare Pacific is moderately to extremely diverse. Fifty-nine percent of students polled said that they experience the most diversity at Warfare Pacific compared to places like home, work, church, or their neighborhood. Over 57 percent of students who participated in the survey said that diversity in higher education is moderately to extremely important. One student reflected, “People always seem to complain that school teaches us much that we’ll never use, but not life skills—I applaud our school for tackling this.”

A 2000 article called Why Does Diversity Matter at College Anyway? addresses the question via a review of the book Diversity and the College Experience by Aaron Thompson and Joe Casse. Citing President Barack Obama as a catalyst for the national discussion, the article states that “diversity is hot on college campuses, too—not just race, ethnicity, and gender, but also religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and age.” Continued on page 13.

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Warne Pacific College
“We lift your name higher” are the words that repeatedly fill the crowded room of McGuire Auditorium on a Tuesday morning. The energy in the air is tangible and permeates the sleep-deprived minds of students. Hands reach high in worship as multiple streams in through stained glass windows. Eyes light up, smiles break out on tautened faces, and bodies sway to the infectious beat. For many, chapel is a time of meditation, prayer, worship, and fellowship with friends. To others, chapel is a place to catch up on last minute homework, emails, texts, or sleep. For many of us, it is far too easy to mentally check out and vegetate, to become complacent and to feel like chapel is simply another thing students must check off their already busy schedules.

Michelle Lang is here to change that outlook. As Associate Director of Campus Ministries, she is here to be a changing force within the college community. Lang is a part of the leadership team that oversees all of the chapel services throughout the academic year. Essentially, her job is to create opportunities and experiences for students to have spiritual encounters during their time at the college. “That fifty minutes in chapel, to me, is so significant. For people who don’t want to be there it’s long, and for those who want to be there it’s short,” Lang said. “What I want to do is make that chapel time, that time spent, the most incredible, refreshing, life giving fifty minutes of your day. I want people thinking, ‘I have to go to chapel. I need whatever is there. I need that moment to breathe.’”

Lang is excited about being a part of the change that is happening in Campus Ministries. “Being in a structure that is about combining education with spirituality, that is about continuing to encourage and shape Christian leaders, that feels good to me,” she said. Lang also hopes to create an atmosphere in chapel that is reflective and open to the faculty and staff. “It hit me the other day there are a lot of faculty and staff members that attend these chapels. They are coming to get something too. They have work to do and deadlines to meet, just like the students. I want them to feel re-energized as well.

Kelley Downing, a junior and a member of the chapel worship team, expressed her thoughts on Lang’s influence and involvement this fall. “Michelle Lang is a passionate, goal-driven woman who loves God and wants others to experience His presence in chapel and on campus. She is welcoming and excited to being intentional change to Warner Pacific.” When asked about the changes that are to be expected with Lang’s new presence in chapel, Jess Bialas, Director of Campus Ministries, responded, “We were excited to have her to join the college as we all are in the process of creating programs and services that continue growth towards the vision of what WPC can be. I am excited to have her as a partner in ministry as the college looks into its Christ-centered, urban, diverse mission, and I cannot wait to see how God uses her here.”

It is hard not to notice the confidence and strength with which Lang carries herself. She has a way of making you feel instantly at home. She is fierce, full of spunk, and on fire for God. A smile escapes her mouth as she explains how her experience at Warner Pacific has been both welcoming and enlightening. “I was brought here to help shift the culture, but when you weren’t a part of the culture before, you don’t exactly know what that means. It’s like trying to go into a Greek restaurant to cook Mexican food. I don’t know if I’m doing it right. You know, we all agreed that we want to eat food, but I don’t know what the true food was like before I got here, so I’m cooking with blinder on.” She remembered when Ben Smed, Assistant to the President’s Office, and Jean Bialas called her: “I wasn’t looking for a job or change. But when Warner Pacific called, I had to at least consider the possibility that this was God. I felt lost, and Warner’s call felt found to me.”

Before Lang was Associate Director of Campus Ministries at Warner Pacific, she was a part of an urban gospel band in Seattle, Washington, known as Michelle Lang & Still Water, which was awarded Seattle’s Best Contemporary Urban Gospel Group (michellelangstillwater.com). Lang is also recognized as having started the SingLight All-City Youth Conference in Seattle, “a three day multi-cultural cross-cultural event that offers youth and youth workers a regional, high-quality, accessible conference that gives them the opportunity to deepen and declare their faith while empowering and inspiring them with tools to positively affect the world around them” (singlightconference.org). Lang graduated from Seattle Pacific University with a B.A. in Psychology. She adores animated movies, especially Shank and the Lion King. She grew her life to Christ at a puppet show, and she loves to dance. Her specialty is sweet potato pie.

Lang hopes that students will come to her if they ever have any questions about what she does, want to share their thoughts and opinions, prayer requests, or simply have a sit down chat. “Outside of chapel time, I hope to connect with students. They look at me and think, ‘There is something in chapel and I want her to talk about it’ or ‘I’m going through something and I want to talk to her. I trust her.”

In November, a follow-up interview with Lang, she provided additional reflections about her first months at the college. “Change is difficult; we have gone from a polished team of three people to about ten, which is purposefully diverse in background. Every week someone comes and asks me how they can lend their voice to the worship experiences. The community has accepted the worship experiences for what it was and just kind of went along with it. What I sense now is that people are experiencing something that feels a little more open and they feel that they are now able to add their voices. My job is to navigate how to get those voices in there in the best way possible. Perhaps this is wishful thinking, but a change that I would like to see happen is that chapel be longer. Something as simple as another 10 or 20 minutes would help us linger in those meaningful moments of worship or prayer.”

Students can reach Michelle Lang on Facebook (Facebook.com/MichelleLang405) or email her at mlang@warnerpacific.edu.

by Tori Adlin

Photos by Tori Adlin.

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Knight Times

Warner Pacific College
Service Learning: Becoming co-participants in humanity

BY MOLLIE BERRY

Service learning is about more than the hours required or during. It is about the personal growth of understanding. Service learning is an opportunity to participate in service-learning projects that are meaningful and connected to real-world experiences. It is about making a difference in the community and gaining a deeper understanding of the issues.

We do not believe that service learning is a substitute for classroom instruction. Instead, it is an integral part of the learning process. Service learning allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world situations. It is an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and leadership skills.

Service learning is about the community. It is about being a part of something greater than yourself. It is about making a difference in the world. Service learning is an opportunity to become co-participants in humanity.

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YOUR STORY MATTERS

FACES IN THE CROWD

Lauren Copeland clearly remembers walking into her high school cafeteria in Modesto, California on the first day of school. She was one of only three students from her old middle school; the others, 2,700 were just faces. "There was a panic to stick close to those I remembered," Copeland recalls. She somehow found herself sitting by the three people she knew from middle school, and she didn’t even consider them friends.

Here at Warner Pacific, Copeland is once again a freshman. She has started a face and adapt to a new school and is finding a whole new set of friends. This time she is alone, and communities have to be found beyond facial recognition. The next thing one would look for is how people present themselves, what they look like. Language, skin color, gender, class, diet, or favorite activities often connect a community or clique. This is why when we meet a new person, we start asking them what they’re all about, searching for a common interest. But if there is nothing to talk about, it can get awkward. If we have something in common, even a favorite cereal, we say something like, “No way! Me too!” and feel connected to that person. I think communities bring down the barriers to comfort. It doesn’t define who the people will be friends with, but it makes that wall break down," Copeland said.

An important ethos of the college (found on our website’s diversity tab) states, “The Office of Diversity moves beyond the notion of diversity as just an aesthetic, rather, we believe it is a systematic approach that is an essential element in fulfilling our mission and purpose.” We are called to look at our differences—our diversity, to step beyond the skin colors, the cliques, and the false. Of course, I’m preaching to the choir. In fact, it would be hard to find someone at the college who didn’t agree with spoken word artist Propaganda when he says the lines in his song "Preacher’s Daughter:" "You see my skin, and I see yours, and they are beautiful, fearlessly and wonderfully, already designed uniqueness. Shouldn’t we celebrate that rather than act like it isn’t there?"

We certainly represent a large range of the color spectrum. A Portland Tribune article published on April 25th, 2012 stated, “[ Warner Pacific College’s] student mix is among the most racially diverse in Oregon.” The college won the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) Anheuser-Busch Award for Advancing Racial Harmony in February of this year. According to a recent press release, over the last ten years we have seen the number of students of color grow from 13 to 28 percent, and 43 percent of Warner Pacific’s new employees during that same period were persons of color, well over the CCCU standard. The newest incoming class (the class of 2017) is made up of many students and staff, with a more diverse color, well over the CCCU standard. The newest incoming class (the class of 2017) is made up of many students and staff, including a significant number of students of color, and the college’s goal is to increase its diversity to 50 percent by 2020.

We are called to look at our differences—our diversity, to step beyond the skin colors, the cliques, and the false. Of course, I’m preaching to the choir. In fact, it would be hard to find someone at the college who didn’t agree with spoken word artist Propaganda when he says the lines in his song "Preacher’s Daughter:" “You see my skin, and I see yours, and they are beautiful, fearlessly and wonderfully, already designed uniqueness. Shouldn’t we celebrate that rather than act like it isn’t there?”

However, fulfilling the mission for diversity goes against our human nature to look for what is similar in the crowd of faces around us. The problem is not that most students aren’t accepting of people from different backgrounds; rather, the struggle seems to be that we do not always know how to interact with people who are different from us. I would argue that the next step is simple in theory: to go beyond the demographics and begin to indulge in the fact that we can all announce that we are different without any judgment.

STORIES MATTER

I like to think of a new person I’ve never met before as a book. Although the front cover can be captivating, the story contained within is what allows the true attachment to take place. Every person has a library of culture; they hold pages that have yet to be opened and read. Take the following three students: Honey Ali, Jongsero Soo and Pin Macarena Vida Piao. They were all born on different continents, and they have lived worlds apart from where they now attend college. Ali was in my FSL class (now FSLC), so we naturally met through the college curriculum. Soo was a bit of an outsider in the Upper Warner Hall his first year as an international student. All it took to break the ice for us was asking about his military experience in South Korea, and I started reflecting on how it might compare to my experiences with the U.S. military. Piao was the one person I didn’t know until I interviewed her for this story. It would make me sad if I had let a person like Piao walk out the doors after graduation without even getting to know her name, yet there are still people on campus I know only as a face, a front cover, and nothing more. What would it take for me to step out and meet more than my small circle of friends? As John F. Kennedy said, “There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long-range costs of comfort and inaction.”

HONEY ALI

Honey was born in Nagde Bane, Ethiopia. "I got the name because I was born under a tree that had honey dripping from it; they celebrated my birth by eating honey." However, her birth also shows that life in Ethiopia isn’t always as sweet as honey; as her parents wanted a boy but received a girl. "It was disappointing to them," Ali said with a frown. "That’s the culture. If you have a son, your name will be carried on."

As a female in Ethiopia, she was expected to do more practical things like tending the farm and taking care of the younger ones. Ali’s grandmother raised her. She was one of 14 kids to take care of after Honey’s uncle died. "As a community we raise each other, like we raise each other’s kids."
In order to escape the late 1990s famine in Ethiopia, Ali's family first moved to Kenya, and then arrived in America when she was nine years old. In America, she was able to go to school for the first time.

Ali's grandmother died in 2003, and she can remember the day as if it were yesterday. "Picture your living room. A traffic jam of people trying to get where they need to be. So many faces you don't know. Everyone is sad and crying for a whole week." When Ali says crying for a whole week, she is literal. Every Ethiopian in the area knows the family crowd in the living room for a whole week and the shock that the grieving family, sitting, crying, praying, and laughing off the pain. "Missing doesn’t work. If you are in America, you don’t want to spread everywhere you go." Once the week of mourning is over, Ali explained, the sad feelings no longer dominate the personal life.

"I believe everyone from Africa is a fighter. We’re strong. We don’t see negative things on television. We live on television. We live to live, you still have to fight for the family you still have." Ali likes talking about cultural differences. Ask her to discuss both the seriousness and the light-heartedness of her people over a cup of coffee.

JONGWON SEO

Jongwon was born in Yeosu, South Korea in 1986. Yeosu is on the southern coast of South Korea and it is called "beautiful waters." The whole city is like a giant SeaWorld, always busy and lively, he said. But SeaWorld didn’t have time to inhale the beauty of his city much. By the time he was in high school, he was going to school from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. "It’s like getting stuck in the library with surveillance from your

Google. He spontaneously gets on a bus, rides until the last stop, and talks with people in the town. Seo believes that every culture and every person should be able to experience life, especially God’s love and grace. "I want to go to Jesus countries, I want to know what they believe in and how they live. Is there a place I want to forget about Jesus?” Seo asked. Ask Jongwon about his recent missions trip; he will sit down and tell you how he shared his love of Jesus while playing soccer with a group of African kids.

PIA MACARENA VELIZ PINO

Pino is the financial officer for the Student Diversity Council. She reflects that the college still needs to make the step past more statistics in order to be more of a global community. "It’s not enough to have people around the campus just because they have different colored skin. We’re not open to what they think or feel," she said. "I think it’s important because the demographic is changing here in the U.S. All over the world people are immigrating, I’m an immigrant and will continue to be, maybe in Canada or Mexico. I’m open." Pino invites us to realize that diversity goes beyond skin color, and that we need to listen to our hearts and people we don’t understand.

SHOWING OUR TRUE FACE

Every year, we have a brand new set of students on campus. Most of them, like Lauren Copeland, will come from a public high school. Copeland feels like the upper classmen are more like an example and a group to learn from. "They mingle to the extent that they want. About her incoming group, Copeland said, "I hope that very few people feel like they have to go to another hall outside the classroom. We’re in this school as a community, even if we’re not involved in the same interests." She sees the obvious trends concerning who drops out, who lives on campus, in the dining hall and even in the classroom.

The high school days of zonking at anything marketed as "cool" are over. So why are we still in hiding? How many people at Warner Pacific still look scared, not glancing at the eyes of anyone as they pass by the classrooms, as they check their heads and sit alone in the cafeteria, as they slowly make their way around the building? The time to hide, the time to say you are not important enough, and the time to say you are just one of the many in the majority is over. You are unique, you are different, and your story matters. Our campus has a bunch of stories, more stories than Otto F. Linn Library could hold. According to Rabbi Mark, leader of Beit Shalom, says: "The lies that we can fit into this world. We’re all mistakes. We’re all mistakes that find our place; by living authentically, then we fit.

Authenticity is what makes us diverse, and authenticity is what makes us united. C.S. Lewis wrote that friendship is like a secret thread; there is nothing mysterious in what bonds two humans being into friendship. Getting to know everybody isn’t the goal, but allowing yourself to miss the opportunity of meeting someone who could potentially be a life mentor, best friend, role model, or even spouse should be denied because you are scared of an incubator about a person. As Pino lamented, "It’s easier for people not to get involved with different cultural backgrounds. If they are well with the way they are, why would they want to change things?"

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I hate Villages would have an interesting perspective on my experiences. In the time I’ve been in this country, I’ve met a dozen people because of the way I’ve been talked to. I’ve met people who look like me, but I was not able to find that the Christians I met have more forward thinking, more open for the religious life. I think they are more people of the same age in their life, and I try to be Christian of you to be "home-schooled" for that minority voice. As we want to talk, we give you some perspectives from his place in life. "The Northwest looks at religion like it looks at smoking. I was sure you don’t want to do it, but don’t do it in front of my kids, don’t do it in public, and you’re probably using it to cover for something in your life." Buchanan understood that the question is what is asking are shared by many people at this college is some. Her last encouragement to me was that I can’t. The case for the waste religion is not that there’s a good reason for it. There is a good reason out there for being. I just have to look for it."
Parking Pass Pride
by Becca Schrader

A senior graduating this December, I confess that I have attempted to get away with not having a parking pass nearly every semester of the two years that I have attended this college. My first semester I pulled it off by using visitor parking, but by second semester, campus security inevitably found out. I was a student, and I quickly racked up over $100 in parking tickets. I even managed to get a $40 ticket instead of the usual $20 ticket. How did I accomplish this? By parking in the reserved president's spot for an hour when I was running late to an important class presentation in A.F. Gray. My third semester I found out I could park along 66th Avenue for free, and I was so proud that I had found a legitimate loophole to getting a parking pass—until the only available spot one day was at the end of the street. This time I got a $250 parking ticket from the city of Portland since the very end of my bumper "obstructed a handicap ramp" to receive a ticket. Parking along a sidewalk is a common strategy used in the city, but I was not aware of this. Parking off that ticket took all of the money I had saved for Christmas presents, and it created a lot of anxiety for me that holiday season. But I am happy to announce that after those semesters of terrible parking experiences, it only took one parking ticket at the beginning of that semester to convince me to stop the antics of avoidance and surrender $60 for a parking pass.

Some of the reasons for not getting a parking permit are pretty understandable. When asked about his experience, one junior said, "Ugh, parking here is hell. I'm not going to pay sixty-some-odd-dollars to have the option to park in a tiny parking lot where people cut you, or in a grand parking lot." An intern, too, he continued, "What's the deal? It's gross!" He went on to say that he parks along 66th Avenue, though every once in a while, there's a line of people who are not allowed on, and despite the fact that there are open spots, which has caused him to be late to at least a handful of classes each semester.

Even students who do not feel as though it is a personal attack to their pride to purchase a parking pass experience parking problems of their own or others. Student Mallor Berry described a very stressful day that all stemmed from forgetting to transfer her parking pass from her car to the vehicle she was borrowing for the day while her car was in the repair shop. "There was no parking on 66th so I had to park far away. I was late for class, and I was worried about getting a ticket from the city all day," Berry recalled with a grimace.

So, is it worth purchasing a parking pass normal? Not at Concordia University; parking here is free for all students, faculty, and staff. Still, each student is required to have a current parking permit, which they obtain by signing up online. If students fail to purchase their parking pass, they are subject to a $25 fine and being towed from where they park on campus. Concordia University is an exception to the rule, however, and other private colleges such as George Fox University charge upwards of $80 for a year-long parking pass. Larger schools like Portland State University are in another price range altogether; passes from $315 to $369 for a term parking pass. PSU student Nicholas Colin explained that since he has class three days a week, he always leaves himself an extra twenty minutes to find metered street parking. But this strategy still costs money. "Even parking in street spots only, trying to park for less than a couple hundred bucks per semester is impossible," Colin said.

WPC students, learn from the mistakes of those who have come before you when trying to park for free. Visit Knight Line to obtain a parking pass for a more productive academic year. Or, learn the hard way, pay more money in the long run, and feel constantly stressed about all the free spots being taken or getting caught parking in the president's spot.

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According to the research of Trump, and others, it is important to adjust settings because it promotes success in educational settings. By improving our "capacity for change, we can solve problems from multiple perspectives and view the world through a single frame," Trump said. Differences between and expectations must be addressed in order to improve education. He also notes that when the same solutions are repeated, it makes the research process more difficult and it is important to keep different cultural backgrounds in mind.

"This is the way that diversity makes a difference," Trump said. "It is really hard to quantify and measure. The challenge is that people default back to what can be measured and that becomes the norm. But it is important to learn how to bring together different perspectives and create a meaningful representation of different groups. That is really about looking at issues of access, opportunity, power, and justice."
If you love your neighbor as yourself and you want your neighbor to have a sense of freedom in your society—if that's part of your core values—then what you vote for should also take into consideration your neighbor.

—Dr. Steve Carver

The abandonment of the federal government this past October on account of an inability to make an agreement across party lines in regard to the federal budget. Instead of negotiating through their differences, officials became participants in a high-stakes game of chicken. Siebers states, "A public space comes into existence only when individuals agree to act in concert." It certainly does appear that legislators are no longer concerned with the fundamental concept of a public space.

The "as versus them" complex becomes difficult to dissolve when recognizing the Other entails recognizing something that is contrary to your religious beliefs. Dr. Luke Goble, Associate Professor of History, stated, "There may be a moral issue about which the Bible has something to say, but it doesn't tell us how to approach the issue in the political sphere."

It becomes even more difficult for a person to view the society as a whole when their tax dollars are being used to help fund something they see as immoral. Dr. Carver responds to this by asking, "What citizen in a society can say 100% of my tax dollars should go to funding abortion?" The subject of abortion as an example: "No one is being forced to abort that I'm aware of. You choose to exercise it or you don't. It's your personal choice. Whether or not it should be allowed, of course, is the bigger question."

In this case, both sides could afford some commonality with the other. On one side of the issue, the objection to abortion is seen as synonymous to murder. And on the other side, we have members of society who believe that when abortion is used as a last resort, it is not a choice made by a woman's choice to have an abortion but her choice to have a safe and legal operation. Of course, divisions within a society are not limited to the subject of abortion. Other popular dividing issues include gay marriage, immigration, and health care.

It's important to recognize that living in a plural society often means living with a diversity of opinion. This means that not all the laws or all the taxes will be universally acceptable. The question of whether or not these laws and taxes are universally ethical is something that is in need of debate, but this debate requires consensus between groups with differing opinions. And it requires a conversation focused more on discussion than the pointing of fingers.

There's a whole range of issues to consider before establishing our political identities. One of the major issues, for example, is the quality and reliability of the information that the public will use as the foundation for its political identity. Dr. Carver stated, "Television sources have a tendency to fine-tune their base with certain code words while the biggest issues of our society remain untouched." By focusing on issues that divide the public, political players are able to secure a vote from a particular group, regardless of whether or not the political player will have any power to change the issue once elected. By finding the "as versus them" complex, politicians are able to secure their seat in office.

Dr. Goble also finds a disconnect between politics and good information. But the disconnect has less to do with the objectivity of the viewer. We find ourselves to think that we can look at things objectively and sort information and weigh it, but what we read to do is justify where we're already leaning," Dr. Goble said. "Only by actively seeking out information and ideas contrary to our own, can we shed some light of objectivity."

In regard to the "as versus them" complex that plagues American politics, Dr. Carver stated, "If people want to draw attention to it, then clearly it will exist, but it's not just that it has to do with the politicians. It's certainly not just a biblical issue."

Carver went on to say that calling attention to the differences between one person and another for political purposes isn't something that can be found in the gospel. However, it is something that is readily depicted in the news.

Often there is a stigma associated with individuals who openly speak about their religious affiliations in the political realm. But if I've learned anything from my own experiences, it is that religion is not an unfair way for a person to come to public judgment. However, it is also not a universal one. Resolving the tension that exists between religion and politics means recognizing our influences, our biases, and the public space in which we all live.

There may be a moral issue about which the Bible has something to say, but it doesn't tell us how to approach the issue in the political sphere.

—Dr. Luke Goble

Knight Titan

Warner Pacific College
Hot oil jumps over the pot as I drop the lumpia in, and Pii Miller hands me a piece of thick paper to cover it. It’s about 2 p.m. on November 5, and the Pacific Islander Club is preparing for its first event of the year, Taste of the Islands. Some club members are in Miller’s apartment with me, frying lumpia roll. One is stuffed with meat and vegetables, which Kiki McDonagh made the night before, and the other with banana and peanut butter; Miller and Sophie Agustin made those. Fried rice with spam and sausage as well as desserts are on the counter behind us, all made by Jondi Harris. Once everything is cooked, we carry as much as we can across campus to the SUB.

In the SUB, the community comes together to experience Taste of the Islands. Multiple kitchens and efforts are finally put together on tables in the SUB as prospective students visiting for Campus Preview Day and current ones begin to fill their plates. There’s Kalua pig (a version of pulled pork), Shoyu chicken, chicken Katsu, and Spam Musubi, all accompanied by rice. Someone’s grandmother even made pineapple upside-down cake, and there’s more than enough for everyone. Island and reggae music is playing, until Harris announces the first dance. A few women from the club go up on stage to perform the Hawaiian Cowboy dance. They continued through the Palauan, Tala mai e le lagi, and other Pacific Island dances. The women eventually pull me into the Tahiti-Tahiti, an audience interaction dance where I shake my hips the best I can. Some of my peers in the club learned these traditional dances by the time they could walk, and performed them regularly with family. Paired with a generous home cooking tradition, these events are filled with beauty and depth.

As things wind down, I sit with club leaders Miller and Agustin. “We practice two times a week, have family bonding time a couple times of week,” says Agustin. Extra dance hours are included as needed, especially in preparation for the Luau on April 14th, now in its fifth year. How much time do you put into PI club, I ask. “Phew, too much to tell,” Miller says. What makes those hours worthwhile?

“There’s a genuine interest and care for each other,” says Agustin. “It’s the closest I feel to home,” Miller adds. All of the members—too many to name—will be putting in many hours to prepare for the Luau, the larger dance, dinner, and family event in early April. Believe me when I say that these words do not describe how good this Luau is. The Pacific Islander Luau is good.

The Luau was my first experience with the club. The richness of the food and culture hooked me, but I was nervous about my dancing abilities and didn’t join. When Miller and Eddie Petrie finally convinced me to join, I found the club inviting regardless of my skill level. Not only do they perform and celebrate like family, I saw that the club respected each other like family. This character easily transcended the multiple ethnicities, Islander and not, represented in the PI club.

The spirit behind these traditional foods and dances is the same as it is in their countries of origin: the spirit of kinship. Taste of the Islands was only a taste of the character of the Pacific Islander club. I strongly urge that you attend the Luau event in April and feel the love for yourself. In the words of J.R.R. Tolkien: “If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”

If you’re interested in joining the Pacific Islander club, contact Sophie Agustin at agustin@warnerpacific.edu.