

# **SIUE Launches One Few University-Based Samoan Language Courses In U.S.**

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**BELLEVILLE** — As many Indigenous and Pacific Island languages face declining use among younger generations, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is helping preserve one of the world's oldest living Polynesian languages through one of the few university-based Samoan language courses offered in the United States.

Samoan 101, taught by educator and social media language advocate Viliamu (William) Fanene, entered its second week this Tuesday at SIUE's Belleville campus. The course brings together students from diverse backgrounds who are interested in learning the Samoan language, understanding Polynesian culture, and reconnecting with their heritage.

Fanene is the founder of Talofa Talk, an online language-learning platform that has attracted hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide through social media. Over the past decade, he has helped thousands of learners gain access to Samoan language education regardless of where they live.

In 2022, Fanene was invited to participate in a panel hosted by SOAS University of London, where he discussed the role of the internet and social media in preserving and teaching Indigenous and Pacific languages to global audiences.

Beyond his international recognition through SOAS University of London, Fanene has been invited to share his expertise with academic audiences across the United States. His presentations on Samoan language, culture, and identity have included appearances at institutions such as the University of Michigan, reflecting a growing interest in Pacific Island studies and Indigenous language preservation.

Growing global interest in Samoan language and culture has been fueled in part by the international success of prominent Samoan figures in entertainment and sports. From Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson to WWE stars Roman Reigns, The Usos, and Solo Sikoa, NFL standouts Tua Tagovailoa, Penei Sewell, and Hall of Famer Troy Polamalu, as well as musicians such as J Boog and Fiji, Samoan voices and stories are reaching audiences worldwide. Their visibility has sparked curiosity about the language, history, and traditions of Samoa, making university-level opportunities to study the language increasingly relevant and meaningful.

The eight-week course combines language instruction with cultural context and practical conversation skills. Students participate both in person and virtually, creating a classroom that extends beyond Southern Illinois to learners with ties to the Samoan community across the United States and abroad.

According to Fanene, demand for Samoan language instruction has grown steadily in recent years as second- and third-generation Samoans seek opportunities to reconnect with their heritage and as non-Samoans develop interest in Pacific cultures.

Samoan 101 meets Tuesdays from 6:00–7:30 p.m. at SIUE's Belleville campus and is one of the few opportunities in the Midwest for students to receive structured instruction in the Samoan language through a university-affiliated program.

