Psychology doctoral student Lesther Papa embodies and promotes diversity every day that he spends at USU. He has distinguished himself through his extraordinary efforts to model diversity every day. Both his upbringing in Hawaii with immigrant, plantation-working parents and his time in graduate school at USU bring a perspective to his work in a series of anti-racist focus groups. Issues discussed during the focus groups include increasing the number of underrepresented faculty, adding resources for students with diverse backgrounds and raising awareness on issues related to the lack of diversity on campus.

Papa is actively involved with many activities and organizations at the university. For USU’s Access and Diversity Center program “How to be an Anti-Racist,” he helped write the script, recruit students and took a key role in the performance that raised more than $500 for Puerto Rico hurricane relief. He helped create and produce a video, #DiversityStartsWithI that allowed students to share some of the struggles they encounter as diverse students at USU. Papa also serves the community where he has recruited students, developed programming and acted as a leader to a group of multicultural university students on visits to the Thomas Edison Charter School to help young students learn about culture. He plays a key role in USU’s Polynesian Student Union where he attends all club events and executive meetings and offers his wisdom and experience to the undergraduate students in office.

Soaking up all the university community has to offer, Papa can often be found in the Multicultural Student Lounge in the Taggart Student Center helping students with homework, serving as a mentor for others and encouraging them to be grateful for their differences. Whenever tours of high school students come through, he tells his story and gives hope to those with similar backgrounds.