Pacific Partnerships: The University of Hawai'i-American Sāmoa Cohort Teacher Education Project

by Peggy A. Haleck



Cohort 13 teachers from top: Nerina Toeleiu-Iliili, Rosa Silao, Savliavali Vasega, Rhonda Logologo, Mabel Timoteo, Druscilla Tauiliili and Erolaine Luani (in back)

Early Partnership Efforts

For the past thirty-one years, the University of Hawai'i has worked in collaboration with the American Sāmoa Department of Education (ASDOE) and the American Sāmoa Community College (ASCC) to upgrade the professional level of American Sāmoa's elementary teachers. During these early years of the partnership, several University of Hawai'i professors served as consultants to the ASDOE in specific areas of curriculum and educational administration. These professors also provided in-service teacher training in the form of workshops during the school year and more extensive training programs in the summer. Typically, faculty members traveled to American Sāmoa for four to five weeks during the summer to teach two classes attended by 20-25 students at the community college. Beginning in 1975, the ASDOE began sending a small number of teachers to offisland universities in order to earn their degrees. Additionally, a government scholarship program supported Samoan students earning bachelor degrees in a variety of fields with the understanding that graduates would return to work for

the American Sāmoa government. Many of these graduates became teachers.

Teacher Corps

The first formal, on-island teacher preparation program began in the fall of 1979, under the auspices of Teacher Corps. Teacher Corps was instituted as federal legislation in 1964 as part of Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and provided federal funds for the preparation of teachers. Teacher Corps trained teachers who were willing to work in regions of the country where there was a lack of qualified teachers. In exchange for a minimum of two years of teaching in schools with a large number of minority students, teachers were forgiven the cost of their education. Participants agreed that, after graduating, they would teach for at least two years in urban ghettos, migrant communities, or impoverished rural areas, or, in some cases, in Peace Corps assignments overseas.

The Teacher Corps project in American Sāmoa was established as a collaborative effort between the College

of Education at University of Hawai'i and the ASDOE. The Teacher Corps model was an intense program of courses leading to a bachelor of elementary education degree or a master of education degree for teachers in American Sāmoa. Samoan teachers in the Teacher Corps program first had to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in order to meet the admission requirements of the University of Hawai'i. Fifteen teachers were selected to be a part of this program. They were released from their duties for two years in order to pursue their studies full time. All the courses required of a bachelor's degree were offered, including the general education courses and professional education courses. Classes were taught at the American Sāmoa Community College (ASCC), where students studied full time during the academic year. Students took courses at the University of Hawai'i campus at Mānoa during the two summers of their program. Teacher candidates completed a total of 126 credits, or forty courses. This program culminated in a semester of supervised student teaching in American Samoan schools. In December of 1981, twelve of the original fifteen candidates graduated and went on to become teachers. Many are now serving as administrators and curriculum specialists for the Department of Education and the American Sāmoa Community College.

Dr. Frank Brown of the University of Hawai'i headed up the Teacher Corps project. Having worked since 1968 as a consultant to the American Sāmoa Department of Education, Dr. Brown was very familiar with the need for qualified teachers in American Sāmoa. He was therefore a natural choice in taking over the responsibility of planning a schedule of courses, arranging for UH faculty to come to American Sāmoa to teach, coordinating all of the physical arrangements for courses, and preparing for students to travel to Hawai'i for summer study. Dr. Brown also had responsibility for the supervision of these teacher candidates during their on-island student teaching semester.

Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Project (TTTAP)

Federal funding for the Teacher Corps model was terminated in 1981 and the Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Project (TTTAP) was created in its stead, again by federal legislation. The mandate of TTTAP was to upgrade the basic skills and instructional abilities of in-service teachers in the U.S. Pacific territories, including American Sāmoa. American Sāmoa chose to use its federal funds, in part, to provide a degree-bearing program of teacher education for its in-service teachers and the University of Hawai'i was chosen to assist in this work. Again, Dr. Frank Brown was asked to serve as principal investigator and project director of this program. While the Teacher Corps model had proved to be very successful, it served only a small number of teacher candidates and required that they be removed from classroom teaching

for the duration of their studies. Dr. Brown, in conjunction with the ASDOE, conceived of a teacher education model through TTTAP that would address these concerns by serving a larger number of teachers and allowing them to remain in the classroom during their studies. In the TTTAP model, teachers took courses after their regular working hours. These courses were taught at the American Sāmoa Community College with a larger contribution from ASCC in terms of course offerings.

In order to meet the admissions criteria of the University of Hawai'i, teacher candidates whose first language was not English also had to meet the English language requirement. This could be done in one of three ways:

- 1. earn a passing score of 600 or higher on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL),
- 2. pass the English Language Institute Placement Test (ELIPT), or
- take the required ELI courses in the areas of listening, reading, and writing.

Most teachers took the ELI placement test, which was divided into three sections assessing listening, reading, and writing skills. On average, 17 percent of the individuals who took the ELIPT passed all three sections, while 15 percent who took the test earned partial exemption. Their scores on the placement test determined which ELI courses students would need to take. Five ELI courses were offered: two to build listening skills (ELI 70 and ELI 80), two to develop reading skills (ELI 72 and ELI 82), and one in writing (ELI 73). These courses did not count as credits towards the bachelor degree. The final writing requirement, either ELI 100 or ENG 100, was required for the BEd degree and qualified students to take additional UH courses.

In the beginning, the entire bachelor program was delivered by UH faculty who traveled to American Sāmoa to teach classes at the American Sāmoa Community College. These classes included the general education core courses, the professional education core courses, and courses in an academic minor. The degree required a total of 126 credit hours in the following

General Education Core

- 9 humanities courses
- 3 science courses
- 4 English courses
- 4 social science courses
- 1 math course

Professional Education Core

- 3 foundations courses
- 9 teaching methodolog courses student teaching

Academic Minor

4 – 6 courses in a subject content area such as language arts or math, or in special education

Throughout the 1980s, the American Sāmoa Community College began to develop and take responsibility for teaching the general education core courses, matriculating their courses with the University of Hawai'i and other mainland institutions. This effort was, for the most part, completed in 1986 with the matriculation of English courses as transferable courses to the university, but continues to this day as ASCC adds new courses. Today, most of the academic courses at ASCC transfer to UH. In order to better facilitate the completion of core courses, the American Samoan Teacher Education Program (ASTEP) office at the American Sāmoa Community College was established in 1989. ASTEP has an important coordinating function that serves to provide a comprehensive program of teacher education to meet the needs of the ASDOE and the community as a whole. ASTEP is responsible for keeping records and advising teachers who have completed the general education core. It also schedules general education core courses and organizes special courses and certification programs in areas such as counselor education and early childhood certification

In the TTTAP model, teachers attended classes after their regular workday—averaging two classes per semester. It took, on average, six years for teachers to complete their course of study, typically taking their general education core alongside their professional core courses. One difficulty that arose from this arrangement was that as soon as teachers had completed their ELI requirements, they tended to jump into the professional core courses, leaving their general education courses behind. This cart-before-the-horse strategy often resulted in teachers completing their professional core classes before completing their general education courses, thereby delaying their student teaching. Nevertheless, in the years between 1983 and 1999, 155 teachers graduated with BEd degrees. The vast majority of these teachers report that their primary incentive in seeking higher education was to fulfill their personal desire to excel and to become better teachers. Many of the graduates are now school counselors, vice principals, principals, and ASDOE administrators. As a matter of fact, up until 1995 nearly all of the teachers who completed their degrees were drawn into administrative positions within two years of their graduation.

University of Hawai'i-American Sāmoa Cohort Teacher Education Project

In 1994, the College of Education instituted a cohort model in its elementary teacher education program as one of a series of reforms directed to making the teacher preparation programs at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa more field-based. Two concurrent events brought about additional

change. In July of 1994, Dr. Frank Brown retired from the university after working with American Sāmoa for twentysix years. Dr. Brown's work made a tremendous impact on education in American Sāmoa as he mentored many of the educational leaders of the island. Upon Dr. Brown's retirement, Dr. Anthony Picard took on the role of principal investigator and project director of the American Sāmoa project. One of his first accomplishments was to establish the position of UH Coordinator to consolidate many of the on-island responsibilities of program implementation. The duties and responsibilities of the coordinator lie in six major areas:

- acting as the liaison between the college of education at UH-Mānoa, the American Sāmoa Department of Education, and the American Sāmoa Community College ASTEP Office;
- carrying out unofficial advising of students;
- registering student for UH courses;
- selling textbooks required for courses;
- acting as college coordinator for student teaching; and
- ❖ assisting in the coordination of UH-Mānoa ELI courses.

At about this same time, in late 1995, TTTAP funding expired. Since then, ASDOE funding for teacher education in American Sāmoa has been provided through consolidated federal funds, although the program continued to be referred to as TTTAP. Recently, however, it has come to be known as the UH/American Sāmoa cohort program.

In 1997, the American Sāmoa program adopted the cohort model that had been developed at UH-Mānoa elementary teacher preparation program. The decision was made to maintain alignment of the American Sāmoa program with the UH-Manoa reforms and to capitalize on the strong field-based aspects of the degree. Cohort I was established in the fall of 1997 under the direction of Dr. Peggy Haleck. Dr. Picard retired in December, 1998. During his tenure as principal investigator and project director, Dr. Picard oversaw the implementation of the cohort program in American Sāmoa and established the summer professional development school. Prior to Dr. Picard's retirement, Dr. Haleck took over as principal investigator and program coordinator. She also continued in her role as coordinator of the cohort groups. The first group of cohort students graduated with their BEd degrees in May 2000. The UH-American Sāmoa cohort Teacher Education Project has proven to be a very successful model for the teachers of American Sāmoa and new cohorts have been admitted every semester since then, including two cohorts that were formed in January 2004.

It should be noted that one of the reasons so many courses and services were able to be delivered in American Sāmoa is that professional educators in Sāmoa were nurtured to the point of being fully qualified to deliver those courses and services. This is an important component of the program and one that allowed it to take on such a strong cultural quality unique to American Sāmoa.

The Cohort Model

The UH/American Sāmoa cohort program follows the same sequence of courses as the elementary cohort program in Hawai'i. Each cohort accepts between twenty-six and thirty teacher candidates (this number provides for economies of scale and anticipates a natural attrition rate of three to seven students per cohort). The degree requires a minimum of 125 credit hours, sixty of which may be transferred from the American Sāmoa Community College. A minimum of thirty-one credits is required for the pre-education core of general education courses. This is aimed at providing a well-rounded background in subject matter knowledge for prospective teachers. The pre-education core also fulfills the English proficiency requirement through successful completion of English 151, which is equivalent to UH-Mānoa's English 100. The current pre-education core requirements are:

English Language Proficiency

Successful completion of ENG 151

Pre-Education Core:

1 course in written communication

- 1 course in symbolic reasoning
- 2 courses in global/multicultural perspectives
- 2 courses in arts, humanities and literature
- 2 courses in natural sciences with 1 lab
- 2 courses in social sciences (including PSY 250: Human Development)

After verification of English proficiency and acceptance into the cohort program, students are permitted to begin their studies for the professional education core. This consists of fifty-one credits of course work in subject area methodology, fieldwork, and student teaching. The professional education core includes the following

Professional Education Core

ITE 313	Language and Literature, I
ITE 314	Language and Literature, II
ITE 322	Social Studies, Elementary
ITE 323	Science, Elementary
ITE 324	Mathematics, Elementary I
ITE 325	Mathematics, Elementary II
ITE 326	Creative Art, Elementary
ITE 329	Performing Arts Expression, K-6
ITE 343	Personal and Social K-6 Health Skills
ITE 317	Field Experience, 3 credit (students take
	this each semester of their program)
ITE 315	Field Experience, 1 credit
	(students take this each of the two summer
	terms of their program)
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ITE 390 Student Teaching

ITE 391 Seminar for Student Teaching

In addition to the education core, students must complete 18 credits in six different areas to fulfill their academic emphasis in elementary education. These courses are not considered to be a part of the cohort program and can be taken either prior to entrance into the program or during the program itself.

Academic emphasis in elementary education

One course in each of the following areas Educational Foundations Psychological Foundations Multicultural Education Creative Expression Educational Technology Special Education

Students may also opt to take additional courses for specialization in either special education or early childhood education. This entails twenty-four more semester hours of study. These specializations are also offered at the UH-Mānoa campus and are provided at the request of ASDOE in American Sāmoa to meet the needs of the teachers in both departments. The dual preparation degree in special education has been in existence since the mid-1980s. In American Sāmoa, early childhood education is provided by the ASDOE for children from the ages of 3 to 5 years. Teachers come in to the early childhood program with less college preparation than an AA degree. The early childhood education (ECE) department of ASDOE provides a rich offering of teacher workshops and training for these teachers, including an early childhood certification program awarded by ASCC. At the request of ECE, UH began offering courses towards the dual endorsement in early childhood education. Since that time, twelve ECE teachers have earned their BEd with a dual endorsement in elementary education and early childhood education.

Special Education

Five courses in Special Education				
SPED 421	Strategies for Reading Difficulties			
SPED 425	Partnerships with Families and Professionals			
SPED 461	Assessment, Planning & Instruction for			
	Students with Mild/Moderate Disabilities			
SPED 485	Classroom Organization and Management			
SPED 480:	Technology for Children with Disabiltites			
	(elective)			
Fieldwork				
SPED 400a	Field Training in Special Education Co-re			
	uisite SPED 485			
SPED 400b	Field Training in Special Education Co-			
	requisite SPED 461			

Early Childhood

Four courses in Family Resources

FAMR 332 Childhood

FAMR 340 Family Development

FAMR 341 Parenting

SPED 425 Partnerships with Families and Professionals

Two courses in Early Childhood

ITE 415 Early Childhood Foundations and Cur-

riculum, I

ITE 416 Early Childhood Foundations and Cur-

riculum, II

Fieldwork

ITE 415L Early Childhood Lab
ITE 416L Early Childhood Lab

Finally, several of the professional and academic emphasis courses carry specific focus designations required to fulfill the university's graduation requirements. These focus requirements include Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Issues (H), Contemporary Ethical Issues (E), Oral Communication (O), and Writing Intensive (W). The number of required focus-designated classes is determined by the number of transfer credits a student brings into the program.

Conceptual Framework

The American Sāmoa cohort program embraces the conceptual framework of the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i in preparing teachers who are *knowledgeable*, *effective*, and *caring*. The program models these core values in its own content and structure. It offers courses in an established sequence that allows for mastery of both subject matter and teaching pedagogy. Student self-reflection is an important part of the process. The program encourages students to reflect on their teaching practice and integrate feedback from mentors and peers in relation to their academic and professional knowledge.

Academically, the primary focus of courses is on how educational theories and methods apply to the Samoan setting. Class discussions are devoted to the relevance and application of content being taught at the schools in American Sāmoa. Furthermore, a heavy emphasis is placed on putting theory into practice in the classroom. Through formal and informal observations, cohort students explore the potential value of principles being taught in their university courses.

The principles of teaching *effectiveness* are described in the document, *Standards of Accomplished Teachers*. These standards, based on the Hawai'i Teacher Standards, set forth ten major areas of teaching competency that include standards such as focusing on the learner and demonstrating professionalism. Every semester that they are in the program, through mid-semester to end-of-semester evaluation conferences, students are assessed on their competency in attaining these standards. Students prepare for these conferences by reflecting on, and providing evidence of, their work towards

meeting each of the standards.

The dispositions of a professional teacher focus on the characteristics of a caring and ethical professional. Caring is based on a knowledge and understanding of the mental, social, emotional, and physical needs of learners; skill in creating safe and equitable learning environments; and respect for human diversity and the value of each human being. Focus on these dispositions occurs in weekly seminars and in student-mentor conferences.

Characteristics of the Cohort Model

Three characteristics of the cohort model make it an effective approach in the preparation of teachers. First, the program provides education courses in an established sequence over a period of time. This model of sequenced courses has had a positive impact on the completion rate of students in the program. On average, students take two professional core courses each semester in addition to the field experience course, ITE 317. Students generally take these courses at the same time with other members of their cohort group. This approach has proved to be very effective in encouraging students to support one another through the program of study.

The second important characteristic of the cohort program regards its emphasis on collaboration. Students in the cohort program engage in collaborative learning as they share their experiences with each other and with the instructors assigned to the cohort. This arrangement promotes strong university and school personnel partnerships in planning and implementing the program, and providing support for in-service teachers. It also creates the conditions for productive mentoring relationships to develop between UH instructors and their students.

Thirdly, there is a strong field component tied to the coursework that students undertake each semester. This field component consists of a total of 120 hours of work in an elementary classroom under the supervision of the cohort coordinator and, in some cases, a field supervisor. Because students in American Sāmoa are already in-service teachers, students complete their field assignments in their own classrooms with the support of cohort coordinators who serve as mentors. Both cohort coordinators and field supervisors are in the field on nearly a daily basis, arranging school visits so that each cohort student should be seen at least once every two weeks. Following these field observations, the coordinator and field supervisor confer with the teacher candidates about their classroom involvement, professional development and performance. They assist the teacher candidate in identifying strengths and areas of concern, promoting reflective practice, and developing action plans for resolving difficulties.

In 1995, under the direction of Dr. Anthony Picard, the Summer Professional Development School was developed to provide guided mentoring of cohort students in an elementary classroom setting. Because cohort students are practicing teachers, they do not have the opportunity to work in a mentor teacher's classroom during the regular school year. The Summer Professional Development School provides this opportunity. Its underlying purpose is to model interdisciplinary, thematic, and student-centered learning. It is organized around an overall theme, with each grade level applying that theme in its own unique way. Subject area focuses are most often a function of the combination of those professional core courses that a specific cohort group is taking during the two summer sessions.

During the regular school year, every effort is made to place several students from the same cohort group in a given school so that they have easy access to their classmates and so that they can provide support to each other. Students who are working towards the dual preparation degrees in special education or early childhood education complete four semesters of fieldwork in elementary education and two semesters of fieldwork in their area of specialization. Fieldwork encourages the teachers to adopt an interdisciplinary perspective in their work and put educational theory into practice. Students are given specific field assignments that relate to the courses that they are taking that semester.

American Samoan Adaptations

Certain adaptations to the UH cohort model have emerged over time as a natural extension of the setting in American Sāmoa. The idea of collaboration is a particularly important value in Samoan culture and our students are able to draw on this tradition of working together and put it to good use in supporting each other as they proceed through the program. Cohorts elect officers who serve for the duration of their cohort program. These officers play a vital role in helping the group stay organized. They provide motivation and encouragement for all students with the aim of achieving success in completing the program. They assist in disseminating information, in contacting students, and in building a sense of belonging to the group. In many respects, the class officers serve as the right arm of the cohort coordinator, providing valuable interpersonal and cultural assistance.

A number of traditions have quickly evolved among the cohorts. For example, group identity is an important value in the Samoan culture. The majority of families reside in villages where the traditional *matai* (chiefs) structure is still in place. Samoans highly value their village and family identity. Family and village life supports the values of interdependence (*felagolagoma'i*), collectivity (*fetufa'ai*), and unity (*au au fa'atasi*). These values are clearly in evidence in the degree of support that each member of the group receives, the emphasis placed on cooperation and cooperative learning, the use of consensual decision-making, and the role of the group in resolving problems. Each cohort designs its own

uniforms, adopts a motto, and creates a logo that uniquely identifies their group. Cohort mottos are expressions of unity and of their vision for the future. Examples include "Success through unity," "Teachers for a better tomorrow," and "Quality teachers make each day count." Cohort group meetings often focus on conflict resolution and on planning for how the group can assist each of its members to succeed in the program. Smaller groups within a cohort often meet in study sessions. Some cohorts have established meeting times on Saturdays when students can work together, sharing both material and technological resources in order to successfully fulfill their course requirements.

Cohorts are also very mindful of other cohort groups in the program and a tradition has arisen where the cohort that entered just before them welcomes the new cohort group into the cohort program. These welcoming parties can be very elaborate and are completely planned and funded by the host cohort. The purpose of this event is to help the new cohort feel integrated into the program and to offer advice and support to new cohort students. Again, these welcoming events are reminiscent of gatherings with visiting parties where familial and village ties are forged. The concept of the cohort as a family is very strong among the students and the ties of cohort membership extend years beyond their graduation.

Another example of support across cohorts occurs at the time of graduation. Because the American Sāmoa cohort program is conducted off-site, the university has agreed to allow graduation ceremonies to be conducted in American Sāmoa. Cohorts engage in detailed planning of these graduation ceremonies and elicit the assistance of the other cohort groups in their implementation. A new tradition has arisen where the cohort that will be the next to graduate serves as ushers, provides leis for dignitaries, and is responsible for the clean-up after the graduation ceremony. Other cohorts arrange the musical numbers for graduation, often composing original songs to commemorate the event.

Program Accomplishments

Teacher participation in the BEd program has increased dramatically in recent years. The implementation of the cohort model in the fall of 1997 has resulted in much higher enrollment and greatly increased graduation rates. New cohorts have been added each semester since then to the point that we now have five cohorts running concurrently and involving more than one hundred elementary teachers who are actively seeking their teaching degrees. In addition, the project delivers courses that are required of teachers who have academic degrees outside of education as a means of attaining ASDOE teacher certification.

Program Participation

Participation in the program has increased dramatically over the past fifteen years. In the 1990 calendar year, only

eleven courses were offered in American Sāmoa with a total enrollment of 182. By contrast, the 2005 calendar year marked sixty-three courses offered with a total enrollment of 1,120 serving 210 different individuals. Table 1 below summarizes the participation data between 1990 and 2005.

Predictably, as the number of students entering the program has increased, so has the number of courses and the overall enrollment. The cohort program began in the fall of 1997, with one cohort in place. Each semester since that time, a new cohort has been added. There are currently 104 students in the cohort program. The additional individuals are those who are taking courses for the purpose of teacher certification and those taking academic emphasis courses in preparation to enter the cohort program. The length of the program has varied between two and three calendar years, depending on whether the students are elementary education only or dual preparation and which semester they entered.

The dramatic increase in enrollment can most easily be seen in Figure 1.

Enrollment in classes has increased six fold over this fifteen-year period. This is largely due to the coordinated effort between the ASDOE Teacher Quality Office, the ASTEP office of the American Sāmoa Community College, and the University of Hawai'i.

Table 1: Participation Data 1990-2005

Year	Number Courses	Enrollment	Number Individuals
1990	11	182	N/A
1991	12	246	134
1992	13	260	117
1993	13	252	122
1994	16	334	131
1995	16	284	132
1996	22	472	118
1997	27	468	165
1998	30	572	149
1999	35	602	140
2000	43	793	170
2001	51	1110	206
2002	50	989	191
2003	59	1223	201
2004	58	1116	205
2005	63	1120	210

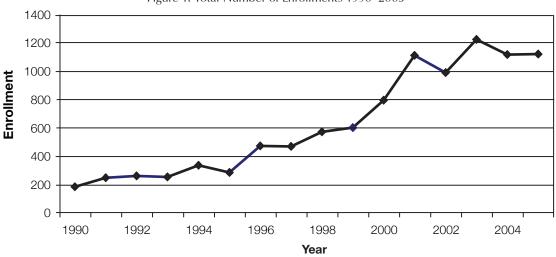


Figure 1: Total Number of Enrollments 1990-2005

Program Graduates

A second indication of the program's accomplishments is the number of students graduating with their Bachelor of Education degree. Table 2 shows the number of students graduating in each year since the inception of the Territorial Teacher Training Assistance Project in American Sāmoa in 1980. The first group of TTTAP candidates graduated in 1983. The TTTAP ran from 1980 until 1997 when the UH-American Sāmoa cohort program began. In the sixteen years between 1983 and 1999, 155 teachers graduated with their BEd degree. The first students in the cohort program graduated in May 2000. In the five years since then, eleven cohorts have graduated a total of 237 students. This marked increase in the number of graduates is attributable, to a great extent, to how well-adapted the cohort model is to the cultural context of American Sāmoa. The sequenced and structured nature of the program, as well as the strong collaborative elements, have led to a much higher level of participation and an increase in the graduation rate. In addition, the program has benefited from the strong support of the ASDOE, which has shown a strong commitment to teacher preparation by encouraging and enabling teachers to participate in the program.

Again, Figure 2 shows the increase in graduates from the program.

Table 2: Number of Graduates, 1990-2005

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TTTAP		Cohort Program	
Year	Number of Graduates	Year	Number of Graduates
1983	6	2000	43
1984	9	2001	23
1985	4	2002	44
1986	7	2003	44
1987	10	2004	38
1988	1	2005	45
1989	2	Total	237
1990	0		
1991	2		
1992	4		
1993	3		
1994	3		
1995	7		
1996	15		
1997	21		
1998	29		
1999	32		
Total	155		

