Introduction
The combination of extending knowledge to the people coupled with the 4-H motto of Learn by Doing describes the American Youth Leadership Program (AYLP) to Samoa. This program took place in 2014-2015 and was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and was administered by the University of Wyoming 4-H Youth Development Program. It provided an opportunity for 20 youth and six adult participants from the 13 western states to experience the Samoan culture first hand while exploring the changing food and healthy-living climate.

The educational theme for AYLP 2013-14 in Samoa “focused on nutrition and food security with educational activities concentrating on how marketing affects decision making, sustainable food production, and food security for school children” (AYLP flier, n.d.). I applied and was selected to be one of the adult participants in the program since the theme matched my State 4-H assignment of healthy living.

Many of the Pacific Islands, including Samoa, have experienced dramatic cultural transitions in the last fifty years. Some of these transitions surround healthy-living issues, some moving in a positive direction and others more negative (Davison et al., 2004). The American Youth Leadership Program provided participants the opportunity to assess healthy-living issues and examine them compared to the healthy-living climate in the U.S.

Specifically, the stated purpose of AYLP was “designed to advance mutual understanding between the people of the United States and Samoa, prepare youth leaders to become responsible citizens, spark an interest in learning about foreign cultures, and develop a cadre of Americans with cultural understanding who are able to compete effectively in the global economy” (http://www.uwyo.edu/4-h/international/samoa/index.html).

The timeline of the program was as follows:
- Youth and adult participant applications, interviews, and selection (April 2014)
- Pre-trip phone calls, planning sessions, email
- Face-to-face pre-trip orientation (August 2014)
- Monthly orientation phone conferences
- Trip to Samoa (Dec 2014-Jan 2015)
- Follow-on projects and reports (Jan-May 2015)

Pre-Trip Orientation
The youth and adult participants were well prepared for this cultural exchange program before traveling to Samoa. Preparation included group conference calls, information distributed via email, and a face-to-face orientation in Colorado taught by the adult participants. During the orientation, participants were introduced to the Samoan language, cultural etiquette, native foods, team building activities, and opportunities to voice and address any concerns.

Highlights of the orientation included:
- Team building/get-to-know-you activities
- Expectations
- Developing group ground rules
- Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable (e.g., sitting on laps to ride the bus, performing in front of each other, etc.)
- Samoan language
- Cultural implications of health issues (e.g., diabetes, obesity, etc.)
- Travel safety
- Focus groups/concerns
- Adult/staff debrief

Cultural Trip to Samoa
Arrival into the country was exciting. Participants started shedding travel clothing as the heat and humidity welcomed us to the island nation. Our welcome continued as we met our in-country host, Samoan host siblings, and Samoan University
students helping with our cultural experience. Each U.S. participant was greeted with a lei and a kiss on the cheek, and then had the opportunity to watch our first Samoan cultural dance by the Samoan host siblings before boarding colorful buses to the capital city of Apia to check into a hotel for the orientation portion of the trip.

**Group Cohesion Activities**
The time spent at the hotel in Apia was meant to gently introduce each group of youth to the other, along with their expectations, language, and food. Youth participants were matched with their Samoan host sibling so they could get to know each other before moving in with the Samoan host families. Many of the activities centered on what the youth knew about each culture and then filling in the gaps. The Samoan youth did a fantastic job doing skits about U.S. family situations of eating dinner, family interaction, and bathing practices. They were out of their league when trying to figure out how large the U.S. is and how far apart the U.S. youth lived from each other. This is understandable since travel around the entire island of Upolu can be done in one day, even driving only 30-40 miles per hour. The U.S. students loved learning Samoan phrases, cultural traditions, and typical schedules of the Samoan youth.

**Moving into Family Homes**
After the three group preparation days in Apia, we traveled out to the villages to take part in our first major cultural event, the ‘Ava ceremony. We arrived in the village of Faleatiu for the ceremony, where village elders gave speeches and drank the ‘ava beverage. This ceremony takes place in a fale (a circular open air building) with participants sitting cross-legged on the floor. From this same fale, host family members came to collect their U.S. guest and take them back to their home. The homes were mostly similar with some living in a fale and others adding a semi-closed structure with bedrooms. The first couple of days with our Samoan families induced a little culture shock in most participants. However, the Samoan people are a very warm and inclusive culture and we were quickly assimilated.

**Group Outings**
Every few days, there were group outings to see and experience as much of the island and culture as possible. Swimming was often included in these trips to places like the Piula Cave Pools, Tafatafa beach, sliding rock, the ocean trench, and swimming with sea turtles. Other group outings included the Lava fields, the Nuu agricultural farm, the Virgin’s grave, and a half island tour. These outings gave the host families some time without entertaining guests, while giving the youth time to reconnect with their peers.

**Nutrition and Food Security Issues**
To fulfill part of the program focus, the students participated in focus groups to discuss nutrition, food security, food selection, and lifestyle issues in the Samoan culture. These focus groups took place by village, or as a whole group, three to four times during the three-week trip. The outcomes of these focus groups are explained below.

**Lifestyle in Samoa**
First of all, Samoan culture is all about family, food, religion, and resting. As a matter of fact, rest took on a whole new meaning while we were there. Resting is part of daily life in Samoan culture and it took some getting used to for our on-the-go youth. Many times after group outings, students would joke that they needed to get back to resting with their host families.
It was not uncommon for Samoans (including adults) to rest or nap multiple times per day.

Family and family events are a big deal in Samoa. The participants noticed that since Samoan families either live together, in close proximity, or get together often, they didn’t need holidays as an excuse to see each other. Multiple times per week, participants were able to experience many aspects of Samoan culture going with their host families to celebrate extended family birthdays, weddings, funerals (that last a week), and greeting family members returning to Samoa. These events included lots of people, food, singing, dancing, gifts, and time.

**Food Climate in Samoa**

As the youth participants observed and discussed foods they were eating, foods that were available to them, and foods their host siblings were eating, they realized that there were quite a few similarities with important differences in the food climate in Samoa compared with what they were used to in the U.S. First, they noted there is a lot of alcohol, tobacco, sugar, soda, snacks, and other carbs (e.g., white rice, white bread, etc.) consumed by the Samoan people. A contributor to this is the lack of stores out in the villages with healthy food options. They normally only have access to village food stands that mostly carry snacks and soda. In addition, participants noticed that it would be very difficult for most Samoan families to have any type of food storage on hand in case of emergency. Many families don’t have refrigerators or storage areas to safely store food (away from humidity and bugs). Lastly, food preparation areas are outdoors and consisted of open fires and minimal cooking tools.

In contrast, participants also reported they were eating many delicious foods with their host families they don’t normally have access to back home (especially right from the tree or field), such as taro, coconut milk, drinking coconuts, papaya, mangos, pineapple, and many types of fresh fish.

**Follow-on Activities**

Upon returning home, youth participants were asked to share what they learned in Samoa with others. This could be accomplished in a myriad of ways, such as school assemblies, group presentations, 4-H club meetings, and other sharing experiences. Much of what was accomplished with the youth was that they have a more global appreciation and respect for people and cultures and that people around the world are much more similar than different than they are. With that goal being accomplished, everyone wins.

One participant summed up her experience stating, “These last three weeks have changed my life and who I am. I’ve been able to experience the amazing culture and people. They have such a strong pride in themselves and it was so amazing to be able to be exposed to that firsthand. I have discovered new things and created lifelong friends and family. I feel so blessed that I was able to receive this gift and experience it with the people I did. I miss everyone already and I hope to see them all in the future. This trip and everyone involved will always hold a special place in my heart.” (Youth Participant from Washington, Jan. 2014, http://www.uwyo.edu/4-h/international/samoa/index.html).

PICTURED: Island Fruit/S. MacArthur

PICTURED: Fish Market/S. MacArthur