



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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by
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SCR 166/SR 124 – URGING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM TO UTILIZE AND EXPAND EXISTING CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMS ACROSS THE VARIOUS CAMPUSES RATHER THAN ALLOW EACH CAMPUS TO CREATE ITS OWN CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMS

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on SCR 166/SR 124. These resolutions would urge the University of Hawai'i to utilize existing curricula and courses rather than allow each campus to create their own.

Interpreted strictly, this would result in freezing the university's curriculum as it is now, using only the courses and programs that exist in 2018 as a basis for higher education in the State of Hawai'i for the future. The university will, however, need to develop new courses and programs as workforce needs and our understanding of the world change. New courses and programs generally are developed on a single campus and then spread to other campuses as demand dictates. In some cases, such as the development of cybersecurity courses and programs, there is a coordination among campuses in developing new elements of the curriculum.

The university welcomes and fosters collaboration among campuses in developing new courses and programs and we require consultation across campuses during the development of new programs. Recently, the university has moved to a common general education curricular structure. This will improve transfer of general education courses among campuses and represents perhaps the most significant way the university is using coordination and joint planning in developing its curriculum. Similarly, several disciplines (e.g., physics) have been working across campuses to align their curricula to better serve the needs of transfer students. Every program is subject to periodic, external peer review to ensure that it continues to meet the outcomes it is designed to deliver.

While there are reasons that curricula in a discipline may be similar across campuses, there are also reasons they should differ. Each campus has a different mission and serves students in the state in different ways. A mathematics program at a community college differs from one at a flagship campus such as UH Mānoa, because of the different programs and student goals each campus serves. Moreover, while we already allow for students to take courses from multiple campuses, we also hire faculty with specialized expertise, meaning that beyond the basic general education courses, faculty

teach within their disciplines as subject matter experts. Offering the same program at different campuses can and does vary based upon faculty expertise. The Doctor of Nursing Practice is an excellent example. Offered at both UH Mānoa and UH Hilo, they may look similar based on title, but the subject matter, focus and faculty expertise is different in each program. Nevertheless, programs serving such different goals must be able to articulate, allowing students who start mathematics at a community college the ability to transfer to a four-year university when they wish in a seamless and supportive manner.

The challenge of curriculum planning at a university system requires a balance between 1) an individual campus's ability to serve the immediate needs of its students, 2) a student's ability to start on one campus and transfer to another campus with a different focus and mission, and 3) the evolving needs of the workforce and the advance of knowledge. Making matters more complex, a modern university program's curriculum is itself a complex mix of general education, prerequisite, required and elective courses. Many courses required by a single major are drawn from the curricula of different departments. Even individual courses often depend on prerequisites or co-requisites from different disciplines. The modern university curriculum is a complex partnership among many disciplines within the campus and any new program will necessarily be a partnership of collaborating faculty and departments.

Accreditation, however, is the overarching reason that curriculum and programs are created at the campus level. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) does not accredit systems, but rather each institution (campus) within a system is individually accredited. Accreditation is required for the campus to receive federal funding, and for our students to qualify for federal financial aid. In the U.S., academic programs are developed by the faculty at the campus level and approved for each campus.

It should be noted that new degree and certificate programs developed at UH Mānoa rely substantially, if not exclusively, on existing courses. For example, the recently approved Master of Landscape Architecture utilizes existing courses in Architecture, the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (Tropical Plant & Soil Sciences), and Social Sciences (Urban and Regional Planning) to name a few.

Further, to avoid the need to create new courses, to address changes in the discipline, or to increase instructional efficiency (where content previously taught in two courses is combined into one course), existing courses are regularly modified. In 2018, UH Mānoa processed more than 400 course modifications to address these issues.

Due to the aforementioned comments, the University would recommend that these resolutions are not necessary and be deferred.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.