Testimony for May 2 BOR Committee on Governance

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To: BOR Testimony <bor.testimony@hawaii.edu>

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Please find attached.

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May 2 2024 Testimony of Jim Shon to BOR .pdf
191K
Testimony of Jim Shon, PhD.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI’I BOARD OF REGENTS COMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE board’s Agenda Item

A. Board Review and Discussion on Strategic Plan Imperative - Fulfill kuleana to Native Hawaiians and Hawai‘i.

• I encourage the Board to consider the state of democracy, apparent widespread lack of citizenship education, and the fragmentation of knowledge about government and civics in its interpretation and implementation of its systemwide and Manoa requirements for any graduate. Conspiracy theories, no matter how unsupportable, abound. Are these threats to democracy of no concern for the University of Hawaii?

• Rejection of the notion that “if they got it in high school, we don’t have to do it.” I have heard this from members of the UH administration as well as faculty. Do the Regents seriously believe that the maturity, knowledge, interests, or circumstances of high school students = to college students? This is a false narrative to justify NOT requiring ANY mature history courses at the undergraduate level – including Hawaiian history.
• If the UH aspires to encourage, educate and prepare leaders of the future, then what a leader should know could be relevant.

Your UH Systems Mission Statements include:

**Foundational Principles**

1. **Hawaiian Place of Learning**
   The UH champions the principles of aloha, caring for people and place, as we integrate Hawaiian language, culture, **history** and values across the institution and its work.

*But Hawaiian history is not required.*

I would encourage the Regents to consider whether the UH, particularly Manoa, is fulfilling its Vision, Mission and Core Values.

*When not a single course in history or citizenship education is required of a UH undergraduate, how can we assert that civic engagement and cultures of Hawaii, Asia and the Pacific are part of the vision?*

*“Our Vision*

The Honors Program at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is at the forefront of the university’s pursuit of academic excellence, transformative education, and **civic engagement**, helping undergraduates craft meaningful college learning experiences that connect to their local and global communities and draw on the **unique resources and cultures of Hawai‘i, Asia and the Pacific.**

*Similarly, how does the honors program deliver its mission to students in terms of “active in civic participation and stewardship with attention to local and regional*
issues and problems” without any history requirements? Are creating options the same as connecting all students with Hawaii, Asia and the Pacific?

The Honors Program is not for everyone. What does it require? “Our Mission
The mission of the Honors Program is to provide a supportive, enriching and challenging environment for students who are among the most motivated and talented at the University. Our program creates a community of scholars who value intellectual curiosity, risks, and challenges; who seek deep knowledge and rigorous inquiry in their own disciplines as well as understand the interdependence of different branches of knowledge; and value the philosophy and habits of life-long learning, intellectual curiosity, continuous growth and reflection. We encourage our students to be engaged in their communities, and be active in civic participation and stewardship with attention to local and regional issues and problems.

The Honors Program offers a thoughtful and engaging curriculum and pedagogy emphasizing experiential learning, research and creative work, and active mentorship of independent student projects. The program offers individualized academic advising and small classes dedicated to Honors students, and fosters an Honors experience and community that enrich our students’ scholarly endeavors.

Under core values for the UH, is there a commitment to educating the whole student?

Our core values
• Interdisciplinary learning: Integrating and embracing knowledge and new ways of thinking from two or more fields of study to find solutions, consider concepts, and share experiences in innovative and transformative ways
• **Critical thinking**: Using appropriate evidence and approaches to support analysis and evaluation of an issue, participate in debate, and offer solutions
• **Communication**: Sharing of ideas and perspectives to connect people and generate dialogue
• **Engagement**: Commitment to educating the whole student while incorporating place-based learning and its contributions inside and outside of the classroom

Recently there has been a growing dialogue as to what, if anything, is actually required of a Manoa graduate. Various schools are also discussing general education requirements.

Addressing the basic commitment the UH makes to better serve all students at its four-year campuses, particularly Manoa, the following questions might be considered:

1. Are the maturity, knowledge, interests circumstances of high school = to college students? Many students are older as well. This has been articulated as a reason not to require history.

2. Some push back against teaching history has come from faculty who believe it is irrelevant to the goals of their students. Is it true that technical/ scientific / medical students need not know about history or democracy?

3. Is it true that requiring specific general education courses, done in the past, is just to difficult or irrelevant? True, there are categories of options a
student may choose from, but history per se is never required for graduation.

4. For prospective social studies teachers at any level, are they all required to take at least one history course? All elementary level teachers will be called upon to teach some history, especially of Hawaii. But sometimes we substitute other related courses.

5. For many years, UH Manoa hosted an educational policy center (HEPC). This was eliminated through a single email. Also erased in recent years was the policy center in Political Science headed by Colin Moore. The Center on Aging has struggled to keep its independence and rigor. High profile directors have come and gone.

So, a basic question is whether the University as a whole, and the four-year campuses in particular, would benefit from a greater commitment to independent policy analysis and reports on higher education, and other key issues that the UH purports to support? Sometimes, such independent (uncontrolled?) input is resented or resisted. What happened to the Ombudsman? Sometimes outside players want to shut them down. Even at Manoa, for years the educational policy center was told there was not even a tiny office space available for it on campus.
As Regents, you are volunteers and often must accept what administrators assert. However, their view may not be the most helpful in making policy for the UH. Their view may be much rosier than the reality or challenges in implementing your own mission, goals, values and plans.

How do we know what we know? How do we know what we don’t know?

In summary, your own statements of mission, vision, goals, and plans may not yet be fully reflected in your requirements. No history? Really? No commitment to civic and citizen education? Really?

Mahalo for your future attention to these issues, and hopefully, a healthy dialogue with applicants for the next President. The UH, with full constitutional autonomy, is the most important government institution in the state, for it brings the world to us, and us to the world. We can all be proud of UH. We can also do better.