Testimony for May 21, 2015 BOR meeting

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To: bor@hawaii.edu

I attach testimony for tomorrow's BOR meeting for the agenda item on Reductions to Previously Approved Tuition Schedules for Fiscal Years 2016 and 2017, for posting and distribution to the Board.

Thank you.

Carolyn Stephenson

Stephenson BOR testimony.docx
152K
To: UH Manoa Board of Regents
From: Dr. Carolyn Stephenson, Associate Professor, Political Science, UH Manoa
Re: Reductions to previously approved tuition schedules
May 20, 2015

I am a UH Manoa faculty member, testifying in my private capacity. First, I believe that, if UH Manoa is to provide Hawaii’s students excellent undergraduate education, it desperately needs the full tuition increase the Board already approved. The fiscal problems of the last several years have negatively impacted class offerings and will continue to do so if we do not begin to re-invest in the quality of education at our flagship campus. A reduction could actually hurt students.

Since the legislature provided only $7.5 million of the $35.5 million UH requested and needed, it would be puzzling now to say that we do not need all of the tuition increase that we said we needed. My conversations with other faculty members and members of the public suggest that people find this inconsistent and confusing. It also makes it more difficult to restore faculty morale.

President Lassner, at the BOR Committee on Budget and Finance May 12, recommended that the UH Manoa increase in resident tuition be limited to 5%, rather than the previously approved 7%, adding that he would ask the Board to waive the reserve requirement for Manoa for the year, as that would make it virtually impossible to achieve. I hope the Board will reiterate the importance of building back UH Manoa’s reserves and agree with him that this cannot be done with a 5% increase. It would seem prudent and fiscally responsible to continue the 7% increase in order to accomplish first steps at building back the reserves.

Perhaps most important, taking such a step after most students have already registered and paid for the Fall 2015 semester leaves the university open to charges of disorganization, and may hurt students more than it helps them. The difference for students between a 5% and a 7% increase is not going to make a big difference in affordability, but will in class availability and thus ability to graduate. Confusion resulting from such an after-the-fact change is likely to be more destabilizing to students than it is likely to actually help them. It will also cost additional time and money to UH Manoa offices that deal with financial aid, as recalculations will have to be done to reduce financial aid with the reduction in tuition and, since many of these cannot be done electronically, it will require large amounts of additional staff overtime. This would be money essentially wasted.

If the Board prefers to reduce the tuition increase from 7% to 5%, then it might be preferable to have this take effect for the Fall 2016 semester rather than retroactively for the Fall 2015 semester. This would be more practical in terms of implementation, and would likely reduce student discomfort more than any decrease in tuition, after they have already paid, might do. I urge the Board preferably to continue the approved 7% increases to Manoa tuition or, if not, to accept the reduction to a 5% increase effective Fall 2016 rather than Fall 2015.