To the Office of the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii,

I gave an oral testimony at yesterday's BOR meeting. Here is a written copy of my testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concerns to the Regents,

Kristin Kumashiro

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Kumashiro Testimony BOR 21May2015.pdf
115K
Good morning, Chairman Moore, Vice-Chair Sullivan, Vice-Chair Bal, Regents, and President Lassner,

My name is Kristin Kumashiro. I am a Professor of Chemistry here at Manoa, Chemistry’s Department Chair, and also an alumna. I am here today to give you a snapshot of the impact of the budget crisis on Chemistry’s undergraduate teaching mission. Then, I need to ask for your help.

Nearly all of the undergraduate majors in the basic and applied sciences require chemistry classes. Over the last 5 academic years, the Chemistry Department’s total student semester hours (SSH) has ranged from roughly 14,000 to nearly 18,000 every year, accounting for roughly 20-22% of the total SSH for the College of Natural Sciences.(To provide some perspective, the average yearly total for the entirety of SOEST over the same period fell in the range of 7000-8000 SSH.)

To cover these 14,000-18,000 SSH, there are now eleven tenure-line faculty members in Chemistry. If eleven faculty sounds too small, that’s because it is. For comparison, Chemistry or Chemistry/Biochemistry departments at our peer institutions typically have between 20 and 40 faculty, more than double or even triple our numbers.

Last year, I put in a request for multiple tenure-track faculty hires in Chemistry. I was told that it could not be approved. I’m told -- “It’s the budget crisis.”

As a stop-gap measure, we hire temporary faculty to ensure that all of our courses are offered, but the process is very different & much slower from 2 years ago. We - the department chairs - write the memos, we follow the rules, and we wait. Sometimes, our requests are denied. Why is it so time-consuming? Why all the hassle? “It’s the budget crisis.”
If my temporary lines are not approved or if the wait is too long and the qualified applicants slip away, the impact in the next academic year is catastrophic. The worst-case scenario in Fall 2015 will be the cancellation of at least six classes, with a total reduction of **over 900 seats**, accounting for over 2100 SSH.

In Spring 2016, the worst-case scenario… worsens. Cancellations of uncovered classes may easily **exceed 1700 seats** (~3500 SSH).

The 900 seats in Fall 2015 and 1700 seats in Spring 2016 translate into 2000 undergraduates who will not get the Chemistry classes they need. Why do I wait and worry, when it should be obvious that our needs are critical? “It’s the budget crisis.”

So here, Regents, is where I ask you for your help with the budget crisis:

1) The 7% tuition increase is sorely needed, but it will only partly address the crisis at Manoa.

2) Please ensure that the budget model that is implemented is a sound and robust one, particularly as it relates to allocation of resources to units that teach thousands of our students, like Chemistry.

3) And then, to ensure its success, please demand transparency and accountability at all levels.

I’ve always been very proud of my own undergraduate education at Hawaii. Please help me provide to our students what my professors and your predecessors provided to me.

*Thank you.*