Reflections on the larger issues raised in the debate about the UARC.

Remarks made to the Manoa Faculty Senate
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FUNDING CONCERNS AND A CULTURAL SPLIT AMONG FACULTY.

A number of University research faculty, especially in the organized research units, are responsible, as a part of their normal job expectations, for obtaining funding--often full funding--for their own salaries, and also for the support of research units that indirectly support many others, including graduate students and regular employees. Their research requires expensive equipment and infrastructure which must be externally funded.

In contrast, other faculty members, especially faculty in traditional "instructional" Arts and Sciences departments do not bear a burden of bringing in external money as part of their core responsibility. For them, there are few sources of large-scale external funding, and they themselves frequently pay their personal research expenses out of their own pockets (their research is "self-funded"), or the more modest funding needs are expected to be met from internal university sources. (These faculty also tend to be paid less.) If they obtain external grants, that is of course admired, but it is not absolutely essential.

This split among types of faculty affected attitudes toward the UARC proposal. Those faculty and administrators deeply involved with obtaining external funding tended to see it as a funding vehicle, generally to favor it, or at least not to oppose it on principle, concentrating instead on its technical advantages and disadvantages. Those few faculty in this group who actively opposed the proposal did so because they thought it had technical features that might not promote--indeed might threaten--their own military-related work or its eventual commercialization.

Faculty of the other type were less inclined to view the proposal simply as a funding vehicle. Those in this group tend to be much less well-acquainted with the realities of funded research and especially about the sorts of research supported by defense-funded science agencies and the ways in which researchers interact with these agencies. When they think of defense funding, they may often think of weapons. They saw the proposal in ethical terms; they considered it in light of the freedom not to be told what to research and the freedom to publish freely; they were concerned about the "encroachment" of the military into academia, and into Hawaii.

Faculty dependent on external funding are worried that their own freedom to pursue research might be threatened by the moral scruples of others--others who seem quite naive, even
misguided, about the research. These research faculty see refusal of support for defense-funded science as part of a larger threat to academic freedom, from creationism, religious fundamentalism, politics of both the left and right, jingoism, etc. More concretely, they are worried about future sources of funding, which their jobs and those of their research groups depend on.
The administration's proposal for a Navy UARC prompted a campus- and community-wide debate that touches on important matters of the acceptability of military-funded research, the role of the academy in developing weaponry, the extent to which the existence and nature of projects can be kept secret, and the right and responsibility of individual faculty members to set their own research agenda and to develop effective relationships with funding sources.

It is too easy for larger issues of principle to get lost in the sometimes acrimonious debates about a particular proposal, the way it was presented, and the people that participated in the discussion. By tying our rhetoric too much to an individual case, we may miss the larger picture. By focusing on the larger picture, we may be able to find common ground and agreement on certain general principles, even when maintaining differing views on others and disagreeing about a particular case or the way it has been handled.

As I have listened to debates and discussed these matters with colleagues of varying views, I have discerned about five broad areas of principle. In some cases, there are positions which I believe are widely, though perhaps not universally accepted.

1. Funding sources.

Is the decision to accept or not to accept funding from a particular source or funding vehicle entirely the prerogative of an individual faculty member? I believe that the consensus view is yes. In particular, University policy must not impose blanket constraints on accepting funding from military or intelligence sources, or from the defense establishment, broadly construed.

2. Purpose of research.

In general, faculty members use their own judgement in deciding what topics to research. Nonetheless, some faculty feel that it is inappropriate for research directly related to weapons development to take place under University auspices. In particular, some think that University policy must definitely prevent the acceptance of research projects intended to develop military weapons that promote the destruction of human life or the incapacitation of human beings. It is not clear to me whether it there is widespread consensus on this matter, or whether the concept of "military weapon" can be defined with enough precision to make the statement of a policy in this area possible. Nevertheless, some universities have attempted to do so.

3. Secrecy.

a. Informed discussion within the University concerning the appropriateness and significance of
research requires such information about what sort of research is in fact being done. Therefore, for every research project undertaken at the University, the University must be able to disclose the existence of the project, the identity of the sponsor, and the general purpose and scope of the research.

b. There is widespread agreement that University policy must be written and procedures implemented that are consistent with the Senate resolution of March 2005 regarding publication-restricted research and also with other applicable Senate resolutions.

c. Some research projects which require security clearance on the part of the investigator(s). There is probably consensus that the researcher has the freedom to accept such projects, as long as such research is otherwise consistent with University policy.

4. Oversight.

Some feel that a system of faculty oversight should be set up to ensure that research undertaken by the University is consistent with policy; faculty members participating in this oversight system should not require security clearance.

5. Freedom act in a private capacity.

Nothing in University policy should restrict the research of faculty members acting in their private capacity and outside the University as consultants to off-campus agencies and organizations. There is certainly consensus in this point.