



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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By

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And

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SB 315 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 315, which appropriates funds to increase the minimum Graduate Assistant (GA) stipend to Step 10 (\$20,472 for 9-Month GAs, \$23,028 for 11-Month GAs). For GAs at step 10 or above, we propose a 2% increase for the first year of the biennium and 2% across the board for the second year of the biennium. The costs for these proposed increases would be \$2,193,360 for the first year and \$2,242,327 for the second year of the biennium.

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 315.

Graduate assistants (GAs) are graduate students who provide academic and program support to academic, administrative or service units of the university. GA responsibilities may involve teaching, research, or administrative duties. Graduate assistantships are the mechanism by which research universities recruit top graduate students into their programs. Their contributions to the mission of a research university are far reaching, particularly in the teaching and research arenas. Furthermore, the ability to work with graduate students are critical factors in recruiting and retaining excellent faculty to the university. In other words, graduate education is the defining essence of a research university.

Governor Ige's education mission is to "Empower our public schools and university, focus on 21st century skills and learning, and ensure schools provide a healthy and safe learning environment." This Graduate Student initiative helps to support graduate education; providing proper support for graduate assistants will enhance the attainment of 21st century skills and learning. Graduate educational attainment is increasingly imperative within the knowledge economy.

The Graduate Student initiative also supports the University of Hawai'i System Directions, 2015-2021, the Hawai'i Graduation Initiative (HGI). The goal is to increase the educational capital of the state. To increase participation and completion of

students, graduate assistantships (and more competitive funding packages) are essential to recruit and retain students. In addition, the Hawai'i Innovation Initiative is designed to create more high-quality jobs and diversity Hawai'i's economy. Strategies to achieve innovation include sustaining and advancing the UH research enterprise. The UH research enterprise is supported by graduate faculty, graduate programs, and, centrally, the graduate assistants who greatly support the research mission of the research university.

The request for Graduate Assistant support also advances the Board of Regents directive on Enrollment Management. Support for graduate assistant stipend levels will facilitate graduate recruitment and retention. A pervasive concern expressed by graduate chairs is that many programs are finding it difficult to recruit top candidates because the prospective graduate students receive better offers at other institutions. Finally, the Graduate Student initiative is also directly linked to the UHM Strategic Plan Matrix. Two Mānoa Initiatives map on to the Hawai'i Graduation Initiative: Enhancing student success and recruiting a vibrant, prepared student body. As mentioned above, recruitment and retention of highly qualified graduate students is directly related to the level of funding offered. Increasing the minimum stipend levels for graduate students will positively impact recruitment and retention. In addition, the UHM strategic Plan Matrix includes two initiatives that map on to the Hawai'i Innovation Initiative: Advancing the Research Enterprise and Fostering Excellent Faculty and Shared-use Facilities. Graduate student support is directly related to accomplishing those metrics such as graduate degrees conferred and faculty scholarly productivity.

Thank you for your consideration.