



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Thursday, March 20, 2025, at 3:01 p.m.

By

Della Teraoka, Interim Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

SR 173/SCR 193 – REQUESTING THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMS THAT DIRECTLY ALIGN WITH JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND INDUSTRY NEEDS WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE REGION OF SERVICE

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on SR 173/SCR 193, which requests the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges (UHCC) to develop a comprehensive list of bachelor's degree programs that align with job opportunities and industry needs within their respective regions of service.

While UH fully supports the goal of aligning educational programs with workforce needs, we have concerns about the approach outlined in the resolution. If not addressed, these concerns could undermine the effectiveness and practicality of the proposal.

The UHCC has a concern that focusing exclusively on bachelor's degree programs may limit the flexibility to offer academic pathways that anticipate future workforce trends. While aligning programs with current regional industry needs is essential, it is equally important to prepare students for future opportunities, particularly in emerging fields. We recommend broadening the scope to include both current job needs and future workforce trends, allowing for a more adaptable and forward-looking approach to curriculum development.

Additionally, there is a risk of industry bias in the development of these programs. Aligning degree programs with regional job opportunities could be influenced by the priorities or pressures from certain industries, potentially leading to the overrepresentation of some sectors while neglecting others.

In alignment with these goals, UH has been actively working to enhance workforce development through innovative pathways such as micro-credentials. In 2024, UH implemented a policy allowing campuses to develop short-term credentials that serve as validated learning achievements, which complement existing degree programs. Additionally, UH has developed a process to define and identify industry-recognized

credentials and will be inviting industry partners to participate in the creation of evaluation committees. These initiatives are designed to be responsive to workforce needs and provide flexible, industry-relevant training options for students.

While we support the overall goal of aligning education with workforce needs, we encourage the Legislature to reconsider the approach outlined in SR 173/SCR 193. Rather than creating new lists of degree programs, UH could strengthen existing efforts, refine current strategies, and ensure that a full spectrum of workforce development pathways – including micro-credentials and other flexible pathways – is included. This approach would better address Hawai'i's workforce needs in a more sustainable, efficient, and equitable manner.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on SR 173/SCR 193. We look forward to collaborating with the Legislature to ensure that Hawai'i's educational and workforce needs are met effectively and efficiently.