



BOR Testimony <bortest2@hawaii.edu>

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## testimony for Feb 6, 2020 meeting of BOR Committee on Personnel Affairs and Board Governance

1 message

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**James T. Potemra** <jimp@hawaii.edu>  
To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Wed, Feb 5, 2020 at 10:56 AM

Aloha,

Please find attached personal testimony regarding agenda item C, "Discussion Paper on Faculty Classification", for the February 6th 2020 meeting of the Committee on Personnel Affairs and Board Governance.

Thanks,

J. Potemra

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TESTIMONY FOR FEBRUARY 6, 2020 MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII BOARD OF REGENTS COMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL AFFAIRS & BOARD GOVERNANCE

SUBMITTED BY JAMES T. POTEIRA, SOEST/HIGP

I read with great interest the “Discussion Paper on Faculty Classification” by Vice President Straney and others and am grateful to have this opportunity to share my thoughts on this. I recognize the paper was drafted in response to the recent State Senate resolution (SR 149 SD1) that calls for a review of the way the University of Hawaii (UH) classifies faculty. I am generally of the opinion that periodic reviews are welcome. In fact, the faculty have several mechanisms in place for their own review, including annually (pre-tenure) and quinquennially (post-tenure). However, the document goes well beyond a review and reaches into both proposing and advocating a new system. Since this proposal has not undergone faculty consultation, in fact it doesn’t appear to have had any faculty input whatsoever, I find it unacceptable. I think the committee should return it without consideration until the authors have had the opportunity to fully, and properly, consult the faculty.

In addition to the wandering nature of the document, switching midway from “review” to “proposal”, there are numerous errors ranging from simple misrepresentation to more egregious omissions.

First, I have to question the timing of this discussion paper. The state resolution passed in Spring of 2019. The discussion paper was received (via email) by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (SEC) on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The UH Board of Regents (BoR) received the same document the following day, and this a mere four business days before the BoR would discuss in committee. Setting aside the question as to why this review took seven months to compile, the release just prior to the BoR meeting makes it essentially impossible to get any meaningful feedback from faculty or otherwise.

Second, as mentioned above, the authors seemed to have overstepped their bounds from presenting a “review” (as called out in SR-149) and took the extra step to include a “proposal”. Had the authors taken the appropriate course of faculty consultation before going to the BoR, they would have quickly learned the shortcomings in their proposal. For example, what about faculty with multiple designations (*e.g.*, part I and part R), faculty who raise part or all of their salary, and/or the potential for “buyout” of certain faculty tasks (*e.g.*, using external grants to pay salary instead of teaching an extra class)? The paper ignores these and ironically describes a system wherein faculty can be classified in any one (or combination) of 11 ways as being “less flexible” than a proposed system of only one classification.

Third, the discussion paper seems to, in a not so subtle way, convolve faculty position classifications with positions that should or should not carry tenure. This may just be a consequence of poor writing or not a not well thought out response, and if it were not for such a serious subject, might be overlooked. However, insertion of which faculty positions are

tenurable and which are not seems well beyond the call. If this is truly the intent, let's have an open and honest discussion about that. Otherwise this should also be removed.

With respect to what ought to be the sole purpose of the paper, reviewing the UH faculty classifications, there are several identified shortcomings. For example, the state resolution requests an inclusion of *"a comparison of other comparable or like universities"*. Did the authors consider in this comparison salaries, cost of living, state benefits, overhead rates, infrastructure, faculty support/mentoring, the land/sea/space grant nature of UH, etc.? This would be key if indeed the intention is *"maintain the University of Hawaii as a contemporary institute"*, but these also play important roles in recruiting and retaining faculty. The authors also write that EP-5.221 addresses duties, responsibilities and minimum qualifications, but this is not accurate.

Further, the discussion paper notes *"We believe our peer institutions have adopted a faculty classification that is better positioned than is ours to respond to the increased demands on the university to respond to the needs of new populations of students, meet emerging state needs, and foster innovations and discovery to drive our economy"*. Why is this? What are these increased demands? What are the emerging state needs?

Finally, the discussion paper includes some strong, albeit unsubstantiated, statements about diversity at the University. For example, *"This [current] system emphasizes differences between types of faculty at the expense of focusing on similarities in responsibilities and functions"*. It seems more logically argued that the current system actually fosters diversity. Related, the paper states, *"Universities comparable to the University of Hawai'i recognize the rapidly changing, differentiated work that faculty perform by designating the proportion of time or effort they are expected to contribute to fundamental activities, rather than by the label placed on their position"*. This "labeling" may be done at the legislative or naïve accounting level, but the UH certainly does not "label" people.

While it can be argued that *"as the primary role of faculty is in contributing to student learning"*, it seems far more productive to focus on the value of the University to the community, not just those who pay tuition. Having a strong University goes beyond just student learning.

Thank you for your consideration.