



Board of Regents &lt;bor@hawaii.edu&gt;

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## Testimony for August 16 RE Civic Education

1 message

**James Shon** <jshon@hawaii.edu>  
To: Board of Regents <bor@hawaii.edu>

Mon, Aug 13, 2018 at 6:47 PM

Please find attached HEPC testimony for Aug 16 meeting re the need to include civic education and engagement in our higher education requirements.

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### HAWAII' I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

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# HAWAI‘I EDUCATIONAL POLICY CENTER

## Testimony to UH Board of Regents August 16, 2018

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Prepared by Jim Shon, Ph.D. Director, HEPC

Date: Thursday, August 16, 2018

Time: 9:30 a.m.

Place: University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Information Technology Building  
Conference Room 105A/B 2520 Correa Road  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96822

RE Agenda Item B. For Action 1. Approval of University of Hawai‘i Fiscal Year 2019  
Operating Budget

Members of the Board,

**HEPC proposes including in your next budget funding for a significant Civic Education and Engagement Initiative. The recent Primary election indicating less than 40% voter turnout should be an indication of a serious crisis in our democracy.**

As a public Land Grant and Sea Grant institution, HEPC respectfully poses the following questions:

1. Does UH have ANY obligation in preparing students for full and knowledgeable participation in our democracy?
2. If the answer is, either explicitly or implicitly, a yes, how many students are required to take courses on our constitution, our government, and how to make sense of our Hawaii and National issues? How many are required to participate in service learning?
3. How does the UH system at all campuses currently compare with other public institutions in terms of civic education?

### TRENDS

This 2016 article on Inside Higher Education reviewed a recent trend.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/05/10/colleges-placing-increasing-importance-programs-promoting-civic-engagement>

Quoting from the report:

“Starting this fall [2016], California State University at Los Angeles students must take two courses in civic learning as part of their general education requirements.

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A combination of workshops, service learning and problem-solving assignments, the courses are designed, the university said, to encourage students to use what they've learned at Cal State to create solutions to real-world issues by working with local nonprofit organizations. Faculty will develop assignments and projects using an online module created by the [Association of College and University Educators](#).

When the requirement kicks in next year, the university will join a quickly growing number of institutions emphasizing civic engagement in their curricula.

“There is this whole discussion of a perceived decline in civic participation in our society,” Michael Willard, faculty director for the university’s Office of Service Learning, said. **“What’s happening across higher education is a recognition that we need to fulfill our historic mission of preparing students to be citizens through new forms of engagement in civil society. That returns to the foundational purpose of higher education. Education has more value in addition to training students for a profession. A student should leave the university with the understanding that they can use the knowledge and skills of their degree for a career and for the public good. Those things are not mutually exclusive.”**

I have spoken with a number of students recently, at both Manoa and community colleges. They do not report any concerted effort to require or encourage civic knowledge. Public policy courses are often optional in our focused programs and colleges. We do not ask faculty to give even extra credit if students can demonstrate engagement, or even evidence they voted.

I would like to propose that your budget include at least an initial commitment to start the process of taking this seriously. Perhaps your Public Policy Center. Certainly HEPC is willing to help. We are about to ask our citizens to approve a consequential constitutional amendment on funding public education, and even more significant, to decide if Hawaii should have another Constitutional Convention. Are we ready? Can you say for sure the students (and faculty) in the UH system are knowledgeable enough to be interested, let alone make an informed decision?

I challenge you to Google this issue, you may find nearly 2 million links relating to this movement. Are we part of the movement?

Thank you for considering this testimony.

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