Testimony for February 18th BOR Meeting

Aloha,

Please open the attachments to view the written testimony from Hawaii Community College Student Government. Thanks so very much,

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Helen Nishimoto, MA
ASUH- Hawai'i Community College Student Government
President
Professor (retired)

2 attachments

BOR Testimony for Aquaponics Program.docx
62K

UH Hilo Aquaponics Project Terminated.docx
518K
ASUH Hawai’i Community College Student Government is in support of the University of Hawaii at Hilo Agriculture and Aquaponics Program. Many Hawaii Community College students take courses in this program and consider it to be a valuable component of their education.

We were informed by a group of our students that the program had been terminated. We find this action perplexing since the program is an important and essential program that basically pays for itself, and has serious viable potential for the State and the Big Island. Moreover, UH President, David Lassner explicitly stated a focus on sustainability and future non-tourism industries for all of ten educational institutions.

In addition, UH Hilo students also have serious concerns about the termination of the program and printed an article in their current student publication: Ke Kalahea (attached). ASUH Hawaii Community College Student Government stands in unity and in support of the UH Hilo students, and share those concerns.

ASUH Hawai’i Community College Student Government highly recommends a reactivation of the agriculture and aquaponics program that the students and the community demands and requires, especially during a time when essential programs that focus on sustainability need to be identified and enhanced.
A group of Hawai’i Community College (HCC) students testified against the termination of an aquaponics research project during the UH Board of Regents (BOR) meeting held on Jan. 7.

The project, “Off-grid Aquaponics to Expand Vegetable and Fish Production in Hawai’i County,” was a collaborative effort between UH Hilo and HCC. It was directed by UH Hilo’s Kevin Hopkins, professor of aquaculture, and Michael Adrian Barnes, aquaculture technician. The students who testified said they were looking forward to participating in the project in the Spring semester.

“We do not understand how this decision could be made considering the state’s initiative on food security and sustainability,” they said in written testimony to the BOR. “We do not see how the closure of this valuable program is in alignment with the goal to increase partnerships with our two campuses.”
The grant-funded project allowed students to learn about integrated cropping and plant-animal systems such as aquaponics. Students grew vegetables to sell at Island Naturals and other local stores and raised fish to sell at KTA Super Stores. The project was terminated at the end of 2020 due to a lack of grant funding and challenges of maintaining sales due to COVID-19, according to Bruce Mathews, Dean of the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Management (CAFNRM).

The aquaponics program was an expensive and challenging operation that involved mandatory federal research, compliance standards, and procedures. “With grant funds supporting the program running out, the aquaponics facility is not able to meet the requirements imposed on it and the revenue stream is insufficient to cover its costs,” Mathews said.

Agriculture is a major industry in Hawaiʻi. According to the most recent farm census by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (DOA), 7,328 farms produced goods valued at $564 million in 2017. About 90% of Hawaiʻi’s food is imported, according to the Hawaiʻi Department of Agriculture. Many advocates of agriculture have been trying to expand the industry and reduce the state’s dependence on imported food to enhance local food security.

The cost of food has increased since 2019. Food prices increased 3.9% from 2019 to 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Fruit and vegetable prices increased 3.2% from 2019 to 2020. Farm businesses have
experienced reductions in output prices resulting from declines in demand, according to the USDA.

In Hawai‘i, crops like aquaculture, macadamia nuts, and coffee have seen a decline in sales due to the economic shutdown during COVID-19. “Our farmers need capital now,” said Brian Miyamoto, director of the Hawai‘i Farm Bureau. “It is getting critical.”

Aquaponics benefits education, economy and community. “Aquaponic systems are incredible for teaching hands-on agricultural processes that integrate between systems and take a circular economic approach,” said Barnes, who served as the site manager. “Commercial aquaponics done at scale may contribute to local fresh food production and sustainability, provide employment, and enhance Hawai‘i’s economy by import reduction,” said Mathews.

One student who participated in the project said the experience was beneficial. “Within our aquaponics system, I learned a lot about agriculture production and producing food for local businesses from farm to table,” said Nicole Mueller, a UH Hilo junior majoring in Tropical Agroecology. “I would encourage [the BOR] to consider allowing for and supporting more research in this area... because of all the benefits that aquaponics could provide for our community where we need enhanced food security as well as giving students a chance to learn about different sustainable food production systems in Hawai‘i.”

The project also is aligned with the UH Executive Policy on System Sustainability which states the university will encourage, facilitate and support basic and applied research initiatives that advance the principles of sustainability. It also states that research initiatives will enable cross-campus collaborations that integrate teaching and research with solutions at the campus, community and global levels.
Despite the termination of the aquaponics program, there still are hands-on learning opportunities for students at the 110-acre Agricultural Farm Laboratory, the Pacific Aquaculture and Coastal Resources Center, and the CAFNRM farm in Pana'ewa, where the aquaponics project was based.

“Our students have the unique opportunity to participate in applied hands-on learning activities that are not available at most institutions,” said Mathews.
Testimony in Opposition to E&M Salary Reinstatement

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Please accept this edited version of the testimony. Thanks so much,

Helen

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Testimony to BOR re EM salaries corrected.docx

64K
To: Board of Regents

From: ASUH Hawai‘i Community College Student Government

ASUH Hawai‘i Community College Student Government felt compelled to submit testimony on the agenda item calling for the reinstatement of the Executive and Managerial salaries. We strongly oppose the reinstatement of the proposed Executive Managerial Salaries.

The financial crisis, following a year of pandemic restrictions/ has devastated the State economy and budget. The bleak projected recovery will take years to even get back to status quo. In these drastic times, unfortunately, we will have to face the fact that it will also require drastic measures.

We are sure that you (Regents) understand that the initial influx of Federal CARES relief funds will only serve as a temporary stop gap measure. They cannot be used for existing services, including salaries. Because salaries dominate the majority of the UH System budget, there will be a need to trim salaries, and the fair thing would be to trim evenly across the board. Without a doubt, the leaders should, and must, take the initiative and shoulder the financial burden that will eventually be required of all UH employees.

In the future, when the economy improves, it would make perfect sense to reinstate monetary and/or other compensations to the Executive and Managerial staff. But for now, in this state of financial emergency, at the very least, salaries of the Executive Managerial UH employees must at least temporarily remain cut due to a once in a lifetime catastrophic event that is battering the economy of the entire world. Realistically, there is no choice to proceed with the mandatory cuts in salaries, especially with top executives, who must lead by example.
Testimony in Opposition to E&M Salary Reinstatement

Larry Kawaauhau, Jr <larrykk@hawaii.edu>
To: Helen Nishimoto <hschoneb@hawaii.edu>
Cc: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu, Kimberley Stevens-Suguitan <klss@hawaii.edu>, Irma Yonemura <irmakk@hawaii.edu>, Jeffrey Yamauchi <jy25@hawaii.edu>, Luis Viegas <viegasl@hawaii.edu>, Naveen Siriah <naveen@hawaii.edu>, Pearla Haalilio <haalilio@hawaii.edu>

Helen had misspelled words and made the change if it's not too late.

[Quoted text hidden]

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| **Your Testimony/Comments** | I am submitting comments on BOR Meeting Agenda Items VI.C. and VI.D. regarding EM salary restorations. I am dismayed to find out that the temporary salary reductions for EM positions only lasted for two months (November and December 2020, with the restorations being retroactive to January 1, 2021). We are only at the beginning of this budget crisis for the university, and other members of the university community have already been severely impacted. For example, the lecturer budgets for many departments have been significantly reduced this semester, and this will likely continue in the semesters to come. Many graduate students and contingent faculty rely on lectureships for income and for career development. However, it is often the case that those of us in the lowest, most precarious positions are the first to feel the impacts of budget cuts.

I sincerely hope that in the near future the university will take into consideration a reasonable level of temporary salary reductions for EMs and faculty, until the university's financial prospects are more secure. I also strongly encourage all EMs to follow President Lassner’s lead in declining your salary restoration, if it is in your power to do so. |
Your Testimony (pdf or word)
No file attached

Actions

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