



Public Testimony Form - University of Hawaii Board of Regents

Please provide your testimony on this form for the next University of Hawaii Board of Regents meeting. Make sure you include all the requested information so that the Board of Regents is able to clearly understand the testimony provided.

Your Name (required) *

Helen Nishimoto- ASUH Student Government President

Your Organization (optional)

ASUH Hawaii Community College

Your e-mail address (in case we need to reach you) *

hschoneb@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required) *

OTHER

OTHER (Please describe) *

Vote of Vote of No Confidence in the Leadership of the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs at Hawaii Community College

Your Position (required) *

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Please see attached.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[No Confidence Statement 3-15-2021.docx](#) (66.1 kB)

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March 11, 2021

After much deliberation, discussion, and efforts to work in collaboration with the Hawai'i Community College Administration, ASUH Hawai'i College Community Student Government -- one of three campus governing bodies -- has no alternative but to give a unanimous vote of NO CONFIDENCE in the leadership of the Chancellor of Hawai'i Community College, Ms. Rachel Solemsaas and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Ms. Dorinna Cortez. Though we have followed protocol and addressed all issues of concern with the administration, HawCC Student Government has experienced a profound lack of interest and cooperation in adequately addressing the issues that have been facing students, faculty, staff, the college, and the community at large. Moreover, we have found a consistent attitude of stonewalling, gas lighting, deception, hollow and broken promises, a failure to follow-through on promises to produce data or provide information, and a lack of transparency during our numerous interactions.

Though our efforts began last June, this situation has been building since both Chancellor Solemsaas and Vice Chancellor Cortez were first hired. In addition, the problems did not begin with the COVID-19 pandemic; in the years prior to the pandemic, Ms. Solemsaas' and Ms. Cortez' tenures at Hawai'i Community College were already marked with controversy and a lack of character, integrity, adherence to ethical standards, knowledge, experience, leadership ability, and communication. All of these deficiencies, coupled with their creation of a growing "culture of fear" within the campus environment, have made it dangerous for faculty, staff, and student leaders to voice their concerns without the likelihood of some type of retaliation. This "culture of fear" is intended to keep people quiet, compliant, and submissive. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the glaring deficiencies in the leadership during a time when strong leadership is so necessary. Rather than support its campus constituents, the administration has used this time to further control and solidify its power by taking advantage of the isolation and the limited ability of faculty, staff, and students to communicate with one another in groups.

ASUH HawCC Student Government has documented, drafted memos and resolutions, and directly brought up to both administrators numerous concerns, issues, problems, failings, and criticisms that have not been fully addressed, dealt with, and ignored. These include the following:

- Overall lack of leadership, communication, and planning. Administrators have paralyzed innovation and creativity because of the "campus of fear" environment that they have created. Administrators create committees composed of hand-picked members, so that they can say they were inclusive of the campus constituency, but their hand-picked will only follow the administrator's agenda.
- Censorship of all information that is sent out to students. ASUH Hawai'i Community College must get approval for everything that is sent to students. There is no such thing as "freedom of speech" at Hawai'i Community College.
- Unnecessary delays in financial aid processing which affected all student awardees, especially in the 2020 Fall semester. ASUH Hawai'i Community College drafted a memo to administration requesting that they not proceed with the changes and to expedite students awards (Resolution 2020-1). They have proceeded with the changes, which are far from complete, and the situation looks worse for Financial Aid processing for Fall 2021.
- Mismanagement of CARES I, II, and III -- the account balances are always changing and the amount being awarded to students keeps growing smaller and smaller.
- Against the system recommendation, students were dismissed and disenrolled from their fall classes because of inadequate academic progress (their courses were moved to online mid semester, which

was a recipe for failure for many). There was no warning and there were no efforts to reach out to students. Despite ASUH Student Government's request to reenroll them and to reach out to them, the VCSA (Ms. Cortez) did not do this and defended the disenrollment. This lack of clear communication with the students in question caused approximately a 10% reduction in the Fall 2020 enrollment.

- Mismanagement of budgetary deficit. The administration has never provided an accurate accounting of the budget situation to faculty, staff, and students. Just prior to the pandemic, they presented what they said was a balanced budget, when, in reality, we fell over \$700,000 short of meeting our reserves.
- Gross negligence to fill time-sensitive faculty and staff positions that were left vacant because administration wanted to hire temporary staff to assist with their "pet projects." All of the vacant positions, as well as their temporary project staff positions were then swept. Because of their lack of ability to listen to knowledgeable faculty and staff, everyone has to work harder to fill in all of the gaps in services.
- Inappropriate control of student fees. Students are not able to make decisions about how their fees are being spent. The decisions on expenditures are made by one person, the VCSA, Ms. Cortez. The Student Activities Council (SAC) was disbanded by the administration in 2014, and despite requests to allow Student Government to reinstate a SAC, no action was taken. The VCSA was told two years ago to activate the council. Though the Student Publications Board was recently activated, she still controls the expenditures and planted her own within the council. In addition, administration will not allow for access to any of the student fees accounts: Student Government, Student Activities, and Student Publications.
- EEO violations in hiring of regular and student employees. There is a clear hiring practice that has been perpetrated against Caucasians. Student Services has only two Caucasians in the entire department. There is an endemic, cronyistic and nepotistic practice of hiring friends and family, while Caucasian students and employees feel the racism.
- Student complaints and lack of services due to inadequate supervision of staff, setting clear guidelines, and a lack of planning, organization, and leadership. Student services are severely lacking because no one wants to work and the VCSA. Ms. Cortez has enabled her staff to get paid, "work from home", and at the same time, students are not being served (no return calls, emails, etc.).
- Reports that the VCSA, Ms. Cortez has used her position and campus resources for the personal gain of herself, family, and friends.
- While students in general feel that faculty is doing a good job during the COVID-19 pandemic, our administration and student services have performed abysmally in what can only be rated as subpar. The recent KAYAK survey substantiates this claim.

In conclusion, Hawai'i Community College is in crisis. ASUH Hawai'i Community College Student Government has lost confidence in the ability of Rachel Solemsaas and Dorinna Cortez to do the jobs that they were hired to do. New leadership is urgently needed, especially during these unstable times of the pandemic and unprecedented budgetary cuts. In addition, an important starting point to sort out the corruption and inability to fiscally lead the college, ASU Hawaii Community College Student Government is also requesting that an audit be conducted: fiscal, personnel with regards to EEO compliance, and a campus climate survey. ASUH HawCC Student Government is doing due diligence by bringing this to your attention. A drastic change is urgently required to make this an institution that we can all be proud of and rely upon to adequately and responsibly educate all of our students and contribute to the community. This is our obligation and duty and we must reevaluate the entire campus structure and recommit to quality education.



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Your Name (required) *

Jeff Yamauchi

Your Organization (optional)

ASUH - HAWAII COMMUNTY COLLEGE STUDENT GOVERNMENT SENATOR - MANONO CAMPUS

Your e-mail address (in case we need to reach you) *

tenkai1@hotmail.com

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required) *

OTHER

OTHER (Please describe) *

Vote of no confidence in leadership of the leadership of the Chancellor of Hawai'i Community College, Ms. Rachel Solemsaas and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Ms. Dorinna Cortez.

Your Position (required) *

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

March 16, 2021

To the Board of Regents,

I am a first-year senator in Student Government at Hawaii Community College, Manono Campus. My major is Hawaiian Studies and I am also a non-traditional student. I am near retirement age having worked in the field of archaeology and education. I have participated in numerous private and government organizations and have learned from all of them on what makes a healthy organization and work environment.

I essentially ran for the senator position to have the opportunity to give back to the people, culture, and community that I love. I thought it would be critical in 2020, given the pandemic which would have a major impact at Hawaii Community College and the entire Nation. Indeed, a year later it has proven to be the case.

During my ten months in office, I was quite shocked on how the Chancellor of Hawai'i Community College, Ms. Rachel Solemsaas and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Ms. Dorinna Cortez conducted themselves with Student Government, and their gross mismanagement of the Institution that was continually being veiled in stonewalling, gaslighting, and denial. I have later learned that during their tenure this dysfunctional leadership has been occurring all this time. Unfortunately, much of the staff and personnel are working in a culture of fear. Nepotism is rampant.

This type of negative leadership and behavior is intolerable and needs to be immediately corrected, but sadly a toxic work environment continues to flourish. New and sound leadership is especially necessary during these unprecedented time of COVID. An audit is required to determine to what extent these issues can be fixed as soon as possible.

Hawaii Community College is in a state of crisis.

Jeff Yamauchi
ASUH- HawCC Student Government Senator

[Your Testimony \(pdf or word\)](#)

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