

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.

***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

David T. Johnson

Your Organization (optional)

Professor of Sociology, University of Hawaii at Manoa

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

davidjoh@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

I am David T. Johnson, a Professor of Sociology at UH Manoa, where I have worked since 1997. I hope this testimony is read at the appropriate time to all who attend this meeting, including the Regents. The questions I ask are so obvious and important that they need to be stated clearly and directly. I have sent similar questions to UH President Wendy Hensel, but I have not yet received a reply.

In the UH Open Forum on March 13, President Hensel said "I will answer the hard questions", and she stressed that "my commitment to you is transparency." In that spirit, I need to observe that nepotism is "the practice among those with power or influence of favoring relatives, friends, or associates, especially by giving them jobs."

People in Hawaii recently learned that Dr. Kim Siegenthaler has been hired as a special advisor to President Hensel (see this Civil Beat article by UH Journalism Student Savvy Andrews, from March 11: <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/03/not-so-public-why-does-uhs-new-president-need-a-250000-adviser/>). Dr. Siegenthaler has a PhD in Leisure Studies and an M Div (divinity) degree, and it seems she will advise President Hensel by providing "strategic guidance about complex institutional challenges." She will receive an annual salary of \$250,000. Dr. Siegenthaler apparently worked with Wendy Hensel at Georgia State University and at the City University of New York, and her hire at UH apparently occurred without formal recruitment and with little transparency. For more details, please see the Civil Beat article, and see also the quote therein by Honolulu Attorney Jeffrey Portnoy, a former

UH Regent, who has objected to the secrecy surrounding this hire and who seems to be saying that the secrecy surrounding the hire is illegal.

I have three questions: (1) Did this hire violate any federal or state nepotism laws? (2) Does what some are calling "the appearance of nepotism" in this case help or hurt the University of Hawaii as it deals with the many challenges posed by the policy changes emanating from Washington DC? (3) Why did the Board of Regents decide this hire in such a secretive way? Georg Simmel, a German sociologist, famously observed that "the purpose of secrecy is, above all, protection." I know I am not alone in wondering: who or what is being protected by the secrecy surrounding this hire?

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 15, 2025 at 9:20 AM

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Your Name (required)

John Galas

Your Organization (optional)

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

galasj@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

see attached.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[BOR letter Testimony for 20 March.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 16, 2025 at 9:35 PM

To: University of Hawaii Board of Regents

From: John Galas, graduate student

Subject: Testimony for 20 March 2025 meeting, agenda item IV, A.

The recent mechanisms put in place by President Hensel are commendable. She has established an internal coordination group made up of university employees to rapidly understand and begin to respond to the federal policy changes. Additionally, she established a group of student stakeholders. This later body will facilitate organizational-community dialogue. While both mechanisms have significant areas of improvement, they are reasonable and appropriate initial organizational responses. Both bodies are a much-needed starting point for galvanizing the massive potential of the university's people to help fight for higher education. Organizational leaders of any organization cannot fight alone; they need every team member to do their part.

I am concerned about several distinct areas. First, I am concerned about the fiscal scenarios and the organization's plan to link needed changes into its operational timelines. Second, I am concerned that the university's policy on speaking to the media is undermining its own interests and should continue to be tweaked. Both of these areas are areas where the board of regents (BOR) can help shape ongoing policy in the university. The final two areas of concern are the mentality of the university towards the federal government and emerging verbiage used by the university leadership.

University fiscal planning

Last week, the president of the Manoa town hall provided a robust assessment of the financial risk along three scenario categories: low, medium, and high. The projections assess reductions in intergovernmental revenue and estimate the required reductions in the force for best and worst case scenarios. The analysis presented is an excellent starting point for a slow moving crisis that is only 60 days old. The ability to quantify and qualify the situation is the first step for high achieving organizations such as the University of Hawaii (UH) to respond and adapt. All of this being said, more needs to be done to add to the analysis in order to inform the BOR's ability to provide guidance, direction, and strategize. The comptroller, with assistance from the department and program leaders, should get to a place in which questions such as the following can be answered and shared with the public:

- Suppose another complete freeze of federal intergovernmental transfers was to occur without notice and for more than a day or two. Could the university sustain programs and services within the semester without disruption?

- What intergovernmental funds pass through the university in a way that would trigger a contractual breach on the university's part. An example might be that student aid would not trigger a university obligation, but a contract for lab supplies paid for by a grant would trigger an obligation.
- Does the university have rapid access to capital if needed? These include its own liquid cash reserves, credit lines, and foundation assets. If accessing any of these sources on short notice, does the university understand its own legal and administrative triggers? A hypothetical example might be that a draw of the foundation would require a vote from the BOR, noticing the department of education, or a third-party source.

The questions listed above are short-term focused, with the intention of ensuring that the organization can withstand a mid-semester shock akin to shocks that other universities, such as the University of Maine and Columbia, have had to deal with in previous weeks. The university should also ask itself when it will have enough information to make decisions about its medium and long-term strategic plans and posture.

- Can the organization make decisions about implementing cost savings by the end of this semester before the beginning of the fall semester? Can it iteratively make these adjustments to keep the organization and its subcomponents on the strategic plan set out by the BOR? Suppose the organization's subcomponents are veering off plan. Do they have organizational means to generate the data and the decision required to adjust the plan in a way that reduces unintended consequences? This is a challenging question that program, department, school, and system-level leaders must constantly ask themselves and begin to generate solutions.
- Between July and October, will the organization have enough information to make forecasts that can inform both its overall "bridge" request for the legislative session in 2026 and also adjust its strategic plan in a way that allows for phased cuts that are minimally disruptive? Two examples are winding down a student service before the start of an upcoming semester, instead of mid-semester cuts, and halting or downsizing requirements for a capital project at key technical milestones in the next fiscal year.
- Has the university identified areas where they can accelerate revenue or enrollment generation? Are the people in those areas incentivized, empowered, and encouraged?

University Public Relations

My second concern is about the recent order to university members limiting communication with the media. I understand why the policy was put in place. It was done so to limit organizational risk. As President Hensel said on 13 March, university members should consider looking at issues from her perspective. She has a mandate from the BOR, from the community, from the legislature and from the organization's members to steer the organization through turbulent times with the least possible risk in the form of cuts to employees, programs and services while maximizing the chances of achieving the strategic objectives set out by the BOR. The current federal administration has shown a pattern of quick and disproportionate responses to direct challenges in the media. Direct confrontations with the federal government will be met with swift retaliation. Additionally, university members who go direct to local media about changes to university policy and academic environment forgo the opportunity for university leadership to calibrate policy. While we all have first amendment rights to speak to the media, if we do so before engaging internally to effect change, we risk breaking trust with each other. This is especially true as many of the program, department and senior university leaders want to actively protect the University's sense of place, commitment to its academic traditions and Hawaiian values. Unlike the federal administration, the university has conducted a listening campaign over the past few weeks to demonstrate that it is willing to hear and address dissenting voices.

Unfortunately, the university's policy places the university in a disadvantageous position within the informational environment. The informational environment exists whether individuals, groups, or institutions participate in it or not. Those that fail to participate will abdicate their ability to influence the information environment and allow false narratives to begin to resonate. Many have lamented about the barrage of actions coming from the federal government. These actions by the federal administration have effectively flooded the informational zone to the point that many Americans are silently acknowledging them, but tuning out the barrage for their mental health or seeking to only see the situation through rose colored thinking. At a critical time when information is much needed to counter misinformation and provide communities context, the university is simply self-censoring its most potent voices: faculty and senior employees. This policy is equivalent to cutting off one's nose to spit it's face.

So what should the administration do? It should look at expanding the policy's language, exploring opening the information pathways through the public relations team, and voluntary training sessions to accompany these policy changes, to provide a venue for university members to understand better what is and is not changing. The specific expansion of language should be to allow university members to communicate in a non-political and precise way about how their programs are being impacted, along with the value they bring to the community. The specific expansion of information

pathways through the university public relations team could be a greater use of informational news releases that can provide journalist data points; a prime example would be to release slides from President Hensel's slide deck on high, medium, and low risk assessments in a new release. Additionally, coordinate news and local influencer interviews in which department heads walk a journalist through the tough choices they have to make. Another example would be an interview with the Burn's School of Medicine Dean and a local media outlet. Another way for university members to be encouraged to communicate better and coordinate with their colleagues across the globe about how they are perceiving and adapting to these changes in policy. Finally, more voluntary training sessions and workshops should be conducted throughout the year so that those within the university community understand the legal nuance and balance the university is navigating. An example would be informational sessions about First Amendment rights on campuses hosted by the Williams School of Law or public administration research on the impact of slash and burn tactics by the government's effects on negative externalities to populations they serve. These two examples are ways we can actively shape the discourse while positively fighting for core values.

Dealing with the Federal Government

Additionally, the organization cannot be against every aspect of the administration's efforts. Where there are differences (and there are many!), the university should not only disagree, but actively fight back. Federal policies and grant strings that attack members of the university or its values absolutely must be confronted at each and every opportunity. However, there are policies that the federal administration wants to implement and challenges it will face that universities are uniquely suited to assist with. An example is the administration's policy to support the fly car industry. Is it a wild idea? Yes it is. Is it realistic? Maybe. Could it transform the traffic challenges in Hawaii? Who knows. Is it an idea that the genius in this university could progress with additional federal funding? Yes it can. Other examples are food additive health effects research or student manufacturing startup courses in the business program. There are many ways universities can seek to offer research and services that help the administration achieve its outcomes. Simply hunkering down, scaling back, and suing are not the only options available to the university. Engaging with senior administration officials about what the university can offer should also be a tool in its toolkit. The university is too innovative and too important to allow it's self to get sucked into a zero sum attritional battle with the federal government.

Emerging Workforce Rightsizing Initiatives

Last, President Hensel briefly mentioned finding “efficiencies” on 13 March. While it was a reasonable usage of the term in a good faith explanation of the process that will need to unfold to rightsize the organization to bridge an emerging funding gap, it is a term (much like DEI) whose connotation is rapidly shifting in the American psyche. The term is now associated with the rapid, mindless, political slash and burn tactics. I cannot think of one esteemed business or governmental organizational analyst that would agree with slash and burn tactics. In fact, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that no efficiencies are generated through slash and burn tactics. Business often enter a death spiral in which top performers leave the organization, market share is ceded to competitors, and the opportunity to launch or revamp new product or service lines is lost in favor of milking existing ones for cash flow. In the public sector nations, states, and communities that enter this death spiral often see huge spikes in negative externalities that become self-reinforcing to the point of permanently depressing growth, living standards, and scaring away business investment. Few, if any, short or long term effects are generated. What is generated are choices that should have been made years ago by previous generations; these choices are instead abruptly brought forward in a painful avalanche upon the current generation in the form of an existential crisis.

Does this mean the university should simply not figure out how to survive and thrive in these challenging fiscal times? Unfortunately, the university has no choice but to increase organizational performance through optimization via workforce rationalization and revenue generation productivity. Further, it must continue diversifying revenue streams to enable it to operate as independently as possible to continue progressing its values. President Hensel briefly spoke about the 9 April UH Gives Day. This is an example of how all of us who are angry can take an action to ensure the way of life the university sustains can continue. Fundraising is a good start, but more must be done to automate functions, repurpose people towards growth opportunities, and create new products and services that accelerate revenue generation. The answers for how we do that will take everyone working as a team to figure out. The university should streamline functions before the fall semester to ensure it remains fiscally healthy. What the university cannot do is mindlessly cut people on short notice, without good letters of recommendation, and in a dismissive way all in the name of efficiency. No one will believe the university leadership because reducing workforces rapidly is inefficient and counterproductive.

This testimony includes a long list of items for the university leadership to consider. It is shared with you in the spirit that President Hensel advocated on 13 March 24: robust and frank internal dialogue. This is a challenging time that will only get even more challenging. We need to start the dialogue on how each and everyone of us gets into the fight in a productive way because this is a fight for our values, identity, and sense of place. To meet the moment, each and everyone of us must be actively engaged to overcome the challenge. *John Galas*

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Your Name (required)

Mahinaokalani Robbins

Your Organization (optional)

Department of Earth Sciences

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

mahinaok@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of words and rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i.

I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this unusual, unprecedented, and important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language. UH should follow the "Multi-State Guidance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," issued by sixteen attorney generals, including our own, on February 13, 2025, on Executive Order 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." As one law firm explains, the attorneys general believe that "DEI and DEIA policies and practices are legally viable as they reduce litigation risk by proactively protecting against discriminatory conduct that violate the state and federal law." The Multi-State Guidance states, "President Trump is misleading the American people on purpose of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives," and that "employment discrimination is a serious and persistent problem in the United States."

The EOs 14173 and 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" imply the potential of "illegal DEI." However, DEI is not illegal. The OGC and President Hensel's approach seems to be leading to the transformation of our historical positioning and pride in diversity, equity, and inclusion when there is no legal mandate. What is illegal under Title VII is discrimination on "the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin," a law that UH proudly has upheld. Therefore, our websites should never have disappeared or been modified, listed as "under construction," or have a 404 error. Below, I cite a few examples of content that has been removed or altered. Disappointing is the first on the list, where even the notice of the appointment of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Officer at the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene in November 2024, has disappeared.

<https://nursing.hawaii.edu/sondh-appoints-dr-donna-marie-palakiko-as-inaugural-deib-director/>
<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/soestwp/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>
<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/oceanography/14297-2/>
<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/huliamahi.html>
https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/es_jedi.html
<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seed/> (The original definition of SEED was Office of Student Equity Excellence and Diversity)
<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seedideas/>
<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentsuccess/departments/student-equity-excellence-and-diversity/>
<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ovpae/academic-personnel/search-advocates/>
<https://socialsciences.manoa.hawaii.edu/college-life/our-campus/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Despite UH President's statements that the decision to remove or modify content is independent, the OGC issued guidance for lower-level University employees in light of the EOs. The claim of autonomy of lower-level administrators (some who openly challenged this claim) to remove content seems insincere. The vagueness of the EOs and UH's direction to "assess risk" has caused a hodgepodge of changes. For example, consider these statements in communication from upper level administrators to lower level ones that was shared publicly:

"OGC's role is to 1) Identify whether something on the website could be viewed as unlawful (unlikely to have anything concrete in this category as the EOs are not law per se. 2) Identify areas of risk based on where federal policy as expressed in the EOs is likely to go."

"If OGC identifies something as high risk it is important that leadership review the language and determine whether it can be expressed in a way that lowers the risk, either by using different language or eliminating non-essential content that is high risk. OGC is there to help them through that process and the process should be consultative and collaborative wherever possible. Changing may not bring us into compliance with EOs but helps us ensure we are using our terms thoughtfully and accurately rather than adhering to terminology that has a negative association from some parties."

Clearly, these "points of clarification" present a contradiction to the guidance issued by our Attorney General. In another example, this email, which refers to the "Dear Colleague" letter which holds no legal weight, was sent to student employees and may be a violation of free speech:

"In order to be in compliance with the letter's deadline . . . we are being told by upper administration to review a lot of materials linked to our office and to focus on the terms "diversity", "equity", "inclusivity" and "accessibility". A few of the examples highlighted at yesterday's meeting to review and update include:

review and update bios on the website; review email signature and remove pronouns; review and update LinkedIn Profile (if you have one); update or remove signage around the office; update or remove social media posts (if linked to [this department] letterhead with no EEO statement; update mission statement."

As BOR, you must agree it is wrong and unfair to send a "Dear Colleague" letter without any explanation as to its legal status or to ask UH personnel to consider changes to UH websites and their own social media. I also understand that there is a list of "forbidden" words sourced from the federal government which include "diversity," "cultural heritage," "ethnicity," "advocate," and "women" that is being shared on some of our campuses for what to remove from UH websites. The UH System leadership needs to affirm DEIA values and make this the single voice of UH rather than the misunderstanding and fear occurring across our campuses. The motion passed by the BOR that only permits President Hensel and the BOR Chair to speak on behalf of UH is inconsistent with our democratic values. It is silencing the members of our UH community, especially those lower-level administrators and staff who are accountable for altering or removing DEI language from our web pages and media.

I also request that President Hensel be clear in her presentation of the EOs 14173, 14151, as well as EO 14168 on DEI and Gender Ideology and distinguish them from the 'Dear Colleague' letter for our UH community and the wider state of Hawai'i. For example, John Hopkins University (JHU) lost \$800 million in USAID funding and is further threatened with the loss of federal grants and awards due to allegations of anti-semitism, yet the JHU remains steadfast in maintaining its websites and materials regarding DEI. In President Hensel's forum on March 13, 2025, she referred to JHU loss of funds but did not explain that JHU lost funds due to USAID cuts – NOT due to their commitment to DEI. Public university systems in Washington, Oregon, California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, remain committed and are supporting their campus in maintaining, and in some cases, bolstering diversity officers and DEI language. Our AG, state and federal legislatures, and allies across the US seem to recognize that taking any action in response to these convoluted EOs is the equivalent to siding with Trump's wrongful position that college enrollment and employment hires are not based on merit.

I appeal to your sense of democracy and to the State of Hawai'i's ethos which is based in aloha. Despite the forced annexations of the Kingdom of Hawai'i and the plantation history of these lands, we have remained a shining example of diversity and inclusion, as well as improving upon, rather than retreating, from equitable participation in education and employment. If the UH President issued statements of support and responsibility for DEI in response to the EOs, such as Presidents from campuses in other states are doing, it would limit the current fear and confusion and I would not have to testify for the restoration of UH websites, announcements, and offices. Professional organizations, legal advice, and articles in higher education papers, repeat the message that University Presidents need to maintain their commitment to DEI in their words, ideas, and public-facing media because capitulation will not save us from the attempts to destroy higher education as we know it.

The State of Hawai'i is a front runner in challenging the bias and vaguely worded EOs. Just last week, AG Lopez led another multi state coalition suing the Trump administration to stop dismantling the US Department of Education and protect students. The University of Hawai'i has the support of its state and federal legislatures, its AG and Governor, its faculty, staff, and students, and many of our civil servants to stand firm on our commitment to DEI. Why is it acting so rapidly, secretly, and contrarily and legitimizing through its actions the aforementioned EOs, all which are being legally challenged and will likely be determined unconstitutional?

I hope you will take steps to protect our campuses, students, faculty, and staff and the entire state of Hawai'i by supporting the restoration of UH's content and as BOR stand firm in our historical commitment to DEI. Mahalo.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 18, 2025 at 8:49 PM



BoR 3/20 Meeting - Written Testimony Submission

1 message

David Simone <dsimone@hawaii.edu>
To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Tue, Mar 18, 2025 at 11:00 AM

Dear Board of Regents,

Please find attached my written testimony for the Board of Regents Meeting on Thursday, March 20th, 2025. They are comments regarding Meeting Agenda Item IV.A - President's Report on Federal Executive Orders

Kind regards,

David Simone, M.A. (He/Him)
University of Hawaii - Manoa
Department of Philosophy
PhD Candidate



Simone, David - BoR Meeting Written Testimony - 3-20-25.pdf
181K

David Simone
PhD Candidate
Department of Philosophy
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Thank you, Madam/Mr. President and members of the Board. My name is David Simone and I am a PhD Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

I would like to comment on Agenda IV.A – President's Report on Executive Orders. Specifically, the "risk assessment" policy that is now in place related to any of the words "Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion". I believe this Board sincerely has the best intentions for the UH community; however, this policy, as implemented, has resulted in Orwellian acts of censorship and attacks on our academic freedom and civil rights. While some risk assessment guidelines have been issued from OGC, the lack of coherent risk *mitigation* guidelines has resulted in chaos. Essentially, it results in as many risk mitigation guidelines as there are UH Academic Units, and by my count, that's 18. So, there are 18 different risk mitigation guidelines. And many of those guidelines are extremely vague themselves, resulting in even more chaos.

Sometimes, websites were removed simply upon receipt of the "Dear Colleague Letter" alone. They were removed without any input from upper administrators or anyone else in the UH Community who might be affected by this censorship. There should not be any censorship here at UH at all. But if we really want to have a "risk assessment policy," we should also have a unified "risk mitigation policy," which provides *due process* for protecting our academic freedom, freedom of speech, and civil rights.

An example of Due Process Could be:

Before Something is Removed from a Website:

- (1) Provide a rationale for its removal consistent with the legal and moral principles of academic freedom and civil rights.
- (2) Get the approval of the affected UH community
- (3) Get a Dean/Department Chair approval

After Something is Removed from a Website

- (1) Archive the removed content in case it must be restored
- (2) Make a public notice to the UH Community on what was removed using the rationale provided above
- (3) Implement an Appeals process for restoring removed content, going further up the chain, with ultimately this board itself having a final say.

The last thing I would like to propose is that: President Hensel's Federal Policy Advisory Council should expand to include more voices from our Humanities and Social Sciences who have spent their careers studying moments like these: scholars from Political Science, Sociology, Philosophy, Geography, History, WGSS, etc. – Basically, a **UH Think Tank**. At our university, we are extremely fortunate to have the liberty of accessing world-class academic experts. They

David Simone
PhD Candidate
Department of Philosophy
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

are an indispensable resource applicable to on-the-ground policy-making decisions. They should be utilized, not dismissed as irrelevant. Right now, our policies are not a mere business decision. Time is short, and too many of our morals and livelihoods are on the line to do otherwise. Let us use our strengths to help create a bottom-up policy that defends our values through solidarity. As darkness descends over the mainland, let us be the beacon in the Pacific. We can light the way for others.

Sincerely,

David Simone

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Your Name (required)

Christine Chun

Your Organization (optional)

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

csychun@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.C. Request to Award Emeritus Title to Mr. Michael T. Unebasami, Retired Associate Vice President for Administrative Affairs, University of Hawai'i Community Colleges

Your Position (required)

Support

Your Testimony/Comments

Dear Regents,

My name is Christine Chun and I am currently the Director of Compliance, EEO, and Title IX for the Community College System. I am testifying in support of awarding the title of Associate Vice President Emeritus to Michael T. Unebasami.

I have worked as a direct report to Mike Unebasami for the last eight years in the Director of Compliance position, and worked with Mike previously when I was at the University's General Counsel's office as an Associate Counsel for nine years. I strongly feel that his service and contributions to the University is well deserving of the conferral of the Emeritus title. Mike is one of the main architects in the creation of the Compliance Office that currently services the Community College system. Prior to 2015, the Community College Compliance office and the current Title IX infrastructure was non-existent. Mike understood the University's obligations under state and federal law, and the need for support for students and employees in the area of civil rights. He created a Compliance office, obtained resources so that complaints could be handled appropriately. He lobbied for Title IX Coordinators for the campus, Community College System Investigator positions to support the campuses, and positions for confidential resources for students and employees. These efforts directly impact student success, as well as employee well-being. He has been a steady and dedicated leader who has worked tirelessly

to improve the work environment for employees and the educational experience and opportunities for students.

The formation of the Compliance office, is just one example of Mike’s leadership. He has always been a wonderful supervisor; supportive, communicative, and a team builder. He has always had the best interest of the University in mind and has dedicated his career to serving the institution.

Mike Unebasami is very deserving of the title if Associate Vice President Emeritus. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Christine S.Y. Chun

Director of Compliance, EEO, and Title IX
Office of the Vice President for Community Colleges

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 14, 2025 at 4:50 PM



Testimony in Support of Michael Unebasami for AVP Emeritus

Aaron Nyuha <anyuha@hawaii.edu>

Fri, Mar 14, 2025 at 4:29 PM

To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Aloha,

Please find my testimony in support for Mr. Michael Unebasami for the title of Associate Vice President Emeritus at the [BOR meeting scheduled for 3/20/25 @ 10:30a.](#)

Mahalo,
-Aaron

Aaron Nyuha
University of Hawai'i, Community Colleges
Budget, Planning, and Finance Office
P: 808-956-5382
E: anyuha@hawaii.edu



Unebasami_AVP_Emeritus_2025.pdf

113K

Gabriel Lee
Chair, Board of Regents
University of Hawai'i
2444 Dole Street
Honolulu, HI 96822

Dear Chair Lee,

I am writing to strongly recommend Mr. Michael T. Unebasami for the title of Associate Vice President Emeritus.

Having had the privilege of working directly under Mr. Unebasami for over 15 years at the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges (UHCC) system and having collaborated with him for more than a decade at the legislature, I can attest to his exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication, and deep commitment to the University and the State of Hawai'i. His contributions to the UHCC system have been transformative, and his leadership has left a lasting and positive impact on the institution, its employees, and the students we serve.

In his role as Associate Vice President of Administrative Affairs, Mr. Unebasami consistently displayed strategic foresight, sound judgment, and the ability to manage complex challenges while maintaining a clear focus on the mission of the UHCC system. His leadership helped to shape and sustain the financial and operational success of the UHCC, ensuring its stability and growth during times of change and uncertainty.

Mr. Unebasami's legacy is marked not only by his leadership and strategic vision but also by his ability to build strong and productive partnerships both within the University and externally with stakeholders, including the legislature. His commitment to collaboration and transparency fostered an environment of mutual respect and trust, both of which were instrumental in advancing the goals of the UHCC system.

I wholeheartedly recommend Mr. Michael T. Unebasami for the title of Associate Vice President Emeritus. His outstanding contributions to the UHCC over the course of his career make this recognition well-deserved, and it is an honor to support his nomination.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Aaron Nyuha
Director,
UHCC Budget, Planning and Finance Office



Recommendation in Support of Retired AVP Unebasami's Emeritus Status

1 message

David Tamanaha <davidt@hawaii.edu>
To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Fri, Mar 14, 2025 at 7:52 PM

Dear Members of the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents,

I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of granting emeritus status to retired Associate Vice President for the Community Colleges, Mike Unebasami, in recognition of his exemplary service to the University of Hawai'i Community College System and the students we serve.

Writing a recommendation letter for Mr. Unebasami is no easy task, given the tremendous number of accomplishments and accolades he has accrued during his tenure at the University. As Associate Vice President of Administration, Mr. Unebasami has demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision, and an unwavering commitment to advancing our community colleges. His strategic initiatives have significantly improved administrative operations, strengthened financial sustainability, and enhanced the overall student experience across the system.

No doubt, you have received numerous testimonies highlighting his achievements, from leading the UH Community Colleges to national recognition for energy efficiency and renewable initiatives to his remarkable working relationship with the State Legislature, where he effectively articulated and defended the resource needs of the Community Colleges.

However, what may not be as widely shared are the personal qualities that truly define Mr. Unebasami. Having had the privilege of working with him for the past 25 years, I can attest to his integrity, mentorship, and the profound impact he has had on those around him. He played a crucial role in my own journey at UH Maui College, being instrumental in my hiring, and for that, I am forever grateful. Throughout my tenure as Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services, I was fortunate to have Mr. Unebasami as a mentor, guiding me through the complexities of financial management, human resources, facilities, campus security, and auxiliary services.

Yet, beyond his expertise, it is the values he embodies and instills in others that leave a lasting legacy. He operates with integrity, honesty, and unwavering moral and ethical principles. He treats everyone equitably and fairly, regardless of differing opinions or challenges in engagement. What truly sets him apart is his commitment to leading by example—if he makes a promise, he follows through without fail. This steadfast dedication has been the foundation of his impact and influence.

I wholeheartedly support the recommendation to grant Mr. Unebasami emeritus status. His contributions to the University of Hawai'i deserve the highest recognition, and I believe this honor is a fitting tribute to his exceptional career and service.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any additional information regarding this recommendation.

David Tamanaha, Vice Chancellor, UH Maui College

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***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Michael Roderick Junior

Your Organization (optional)

Students for survival of Israel

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

Mr213@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.D. Request to Authorize the University of Hawai'i to enter into a Lease with the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs for a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic at University of Hawai'i Maui College

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

I am a disabled veteran and a student. I used to be a student at the university of Hawaii Manoa.. but I had to withdraw from classes on a medical leave of absence because of being traumatized by students who attacked me and by faculty who supported those attacks and then attack, attacked me further. A student expressed hate speech against me and my heritage in class and in communications that were required between us as a class by our professor. I made my professor aware of everything and she supported the hate speech as free speech. I reminded her that we had a coat of conduct and that this was a safe space for LGBTQ students, especially and for everyone to be safe from hate and harassment. She ignored me. I talked to the vice. Provost and I made my complaints formally with him, and he assured me that he was going to help me with those complaints, but he did not. Instead, he side railed me away from the official complaint form that he later told me was required. So he was deceiving gaslighting and manipulating me the entire time. Instead of helping me. He was taking advantage of my disability, and he was taking advantage of my trauma and my need for support and help and advice. His job and his role was to file the complaint for me, especially because of the ADA. He didn't do his job and he didn't perform in his role. Neither did my professor. And Kokua at the University of Hawaii Manoa was supposed to help me because I'm disabled and they never helped me with anything not even once.

And I had professors deliberately abusing me on the basis of my disabilities multiple times. The university of Hawaii does not respect veterans. The university of Hawaii payslip service to respect veterans so that they can receive federal funding through the VA. But the university of Hawaii allows

discrimination against students who are white students who are Jews students who are gay students who are women students who are veterans and students with disabilities. And the university of Hawaii supports racist students who hate white kids. And the University of Hawaii supports, illiterate, stupid uneducated, goons who should not have even graduated high school and who bring the rest of their class down because of their ignorance and their inability to function at a collegiate level. I don't believe that the university of Hawaii should be trusted with VA funds. I don't believe that the university of Hawaii should receive VA funds. Not until they actually treat veterans the way they're supposed to at a bare minimum. The university of Hawaii at Manoa is not an educator. The university of Hawaii at Manoa is a place that spreads ignorance and hatred and tolerate stupidity and ill literacy. But it does not tolerate student students who raise issues and concerns in good faith. My professor filed a complaint against me after I withdrew from her class. And the vice Provost, who was supposed to submit my petition for a medical leave of absence well he did submit it but then he said oh well it's not complete. But that's his fault not mine. I want to sue and I need a lawyer so if anyone can help me with that believe me, it will be only justice that is done and the changes that need to be made need to be made. I do not believe the university of Hawaii at Manoa should receive any funds for anything related to the VA, including for any veterans. I believe that all veterans at the university should go to the university of Hawaii Hilo. That's where I'm going. I hear by submit my protest against Isabella O'Keefe and vice Provost, Willama Sanchez. I deserve assistance and I am legally required to be provided with assistance for my complaints against these two fascists who violated the code of academic honesty as well as the code of conduct and they violated anti-discrimination legislation because I am a member of four different protective classes and they supported hate speech and so they are hate criminals. Until these matters are addressed and resolved correctly, I do not believe that this university should be receiving any funds from the VA for anything whatsoever. I have asked for a full refund of my tuition and they are refusing to provide it. I request assistance with that. Thank you for giving me the time to provide my testimony Mahalo shalom and aloha.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 14, 2025 at 6:57 PM

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***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Dianne Shen

Your Organization (optional)

Department of American Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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

dshen@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[Testimony_Dianne Shen_BOR March 20, 2025 Mtg.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 18, 2025 at 8:57 AM

March 18, 2025

TO: University of Hawai'i Board of Regents

FROM: Dianne Shen, Ph.D. student
Department of American Studies
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Comments only: Agenda Item VII.G. Legislative Update

(specifically in regard to HB 300 - Relating to the State Budget and SB 473 Relating to the State Budget)

Dear Members of the Board of Regent:

I submit this testimony to provide comments on the fiscal year operating budget request to the State legislature, demanding that the Board of Regents ensure that UH allocates funding to:

- (1) ensure GA pay equity across the UH System**
- (2) provide backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025**
- (3) enact a minimum pay step increase that will cover the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i**
- (4) implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step.**

Re: Item 1. ensuring GA pay equity across the UH System

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo offers the Masters in Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science, the only one of its kind in the United States. The highly unique program attracts a diverse set of students, some of whom are employed through Graduate Assistantships. Similar to their counterparts at UH Mānoa, these GAs teach undergraduate students, [perform outstanding research work that serves the communities of Big Island](#), and conduct administrative duties that ensures the smooth day to day operations of TCBES. We ask that the Board of Regents act to ensure that they receive just compensation for their work.

In the Spring of 2022, a minimum wage step increase was promised to GAs in the UH system at both campuses, but ultimately UH Hilo was forced to sacrifice a GA position to match the salary increase. Again in 2023, UH Mānoa received raises, and when GAs approached the administration inquiring about raises for GAs at UH Hilo, they were told that they would need to sacrifice another GA position to compensate if UH Hilo GA salaries were to increase to match.

This Spring, it was announced that the minimum GA Pay Step will be increased: [Effective August 1, 2025, STEP 15 \(\\$24,912\) for 9-month and STEP 14 \(\\$28,026\) for 11-month](#). **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to ensure that UH Hilo GAs will receive pay step increases by August 1, 2025 equal to their UH Mānoa counterparts without sacrificing existing GA positions.**

Re: Item 2, providing backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025

In Fall 2024, the [Cost of Attendance](#) for graduate students at UH Mānoa increased to \$25,214 per year. By Fall 2024, based on historical trends, around a third of GAs (~500 out of 1,500) were making the minimum designated pay step of Step 13 9-mo - equivalent to \$23,028 per year. This is also assuming that all GAs have been making at least the minimum pay step - without updated salary data from UH, which they have refused to share despite GAs being designated as public employees, we are unable to know for certain. This means that from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025, around a third of GAs were not being paid enough to attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to provide back pay to all GAs who were not paid at a wage that meets the Cost of Attendance.**

Re: Item 3, enacting a minimum pay step increase that covers the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i

It is common knowledge and lived experience of GAs that we are not paid enough to carry out the important labor that keeps the University of Hawai'i running. The truth is, not only are we paid less than we deserve, but our income level is criminally below basic living standards to simply survive and have shelter in Hawai'i.

According to [Hawai'i Community Development Authority](#) (HCDA)'s 2024 annual report to the State legislature, the Reserved Housing Program determines that a one-person household earning less than [\\$29,250](#) qualifies as "Extremely Low Income," the lowest of three low-income designations. Similar reports from the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) reflect these figures. The most updated minimum pay steps for UH Mānoa GAs (effective August 1, 2025) will be Step 15 (\$24,912) for 9-month contracts and Step 14 (\$28,026) for 11-month contracts, both falling substantially below the criteria for "Extremely Low Income." Additionally, since the Cost of Attendance for UH Mānoa is \$25,214 per year, the increased minimum pay step for a 9-mo contract will not cover these costs. In summary, the minimum pay step to be implemented in August is insufficient - **approximately a third of all Graduate Assistants will not be not paid enough to attend UH Mānoa nor live in Hawai'i.**

We also ask the BoR to consider that GAships are the **only** source of income for international GAs on F-1/J-1 student visas, lest they risk violating the terms of their working visas and deportation. The low wages GAs are paid indicate that UH administration assumes students with citizenship or legal permanent residents should take more than one job to make up the gap.

EVERYONE should be paid to meet the cost of attendance and one job should be enough for all students regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Re: Item 4. implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step

GAs are not earning enough to afford UH's own new graduate student housing. The cheapest rental option (a single room in a four bedroom share) at [Hale Haukani](#), the new housing for grad students and faculty, will cost \$1,433/month on a 12 month lease (\$17,196/year). In this case, GAs under the minimum pay step of Step 15 9-mo (\$24,912 per year or \$2,076 per month) would be spending 69% of their entire pre-tax income just for housing. According to the HCDA, affordable housing for low and middle income workers/families should be **no more** than a third (33 percent) of their gross monthly income. The housing that UH ostensibly built for graduate students will require that GAs making the minimum step pay twice the amount considered affordable for low income workers. And supposedly, these dorms are already the low-cost option - as this option will not house all GAs, many have to find alternative options for housing in O'ahu. According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Market Rents](#) database, efficiency rental fees in the 40th percentile for Honolulu County are up to \$1,887, a whopping 91% of monthly pay for GAs. **We demand that the BoR allocate funding for a housing subsidy for all GAs who are paid at the minimum pay step.**

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Your Name (required)

Dianne Deauna

Your Organization (optional)

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

jdeauna@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[BoR Testimony March 20.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 8:52 AM

March 19, 2025

TO: University of Hawai'i Board of Regents

FROM: Dianne Deauna, Graduate Assistant, Academic Labor United

Comments only: Agenda Item VII.G. Legislative Update

(specifically in regard to HB 300 - Relating to the State Budget and
SB 473 Relating to the State Budget)

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

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receive pay step increases by August 1, 2025 equal to their UH Mānoa counterparts without sacrificing existing GA positions.

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Your Name (required)

Kaiqing Su

Your Organization (optional)

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

ksu4@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[BoR testimony 03_20 \(ALU\).pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 9:22 AM

Comments only: Agenda Item VII.G. Legislative Update

(specifically in regard to HB 300 - Relating to the State Budget and SB 473 Relating to the State Budget)

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

My name is Kaiqing Su. I am a graduate worker in the Political Science Department. I submit this testimony to provide comments on the fiscal year operating budget request to the State legislature, demanding that the Board of Regents ensure that UH allocates funding to:

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Your Name (required)

Derek Rainey

Your Organization (optional)

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

derekrai@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[BoR Testimony 03:20.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 3:28 PM

March 19, 2025

TO: University of Hawai'i Board of Regents

FROM: Derek Rainey, PhD Student, UH Mānoa

Comments only: Agenda Item VII.G. Legislative Update

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

I submit this testimony to provide comments on the fiscal year operating budget request to the State legislature, demanding that the Board of Regents ensure that UH allocates funding to:

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In the Spring of 2022, a minimum wage step increase was promised to GAs in the UH system at both campuses, but ultimately UH Hilo was forced to sacrifice a GA position to match the salary increase. Again in 2023, UH Mānoa received raises, and when GAs approached the administration inquiring about raises for GAs at UH Hilo, they were told that they would need to sacrifice another GA position to compensate if UH Hilo GA salaries were to increase to match. This Spring, it was announced that the minimum GA Pay Step will be increased: [Effective August 1, 2025, STEP 15 \(\\$24,912\) for 9-month and STEP 14 \(\\$28,026\) for 11-month](#). **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to ensure that UH Hilo GAs will receive pay step increases by August 1, 2025 equal to their UH Mānoa counterparts without sacrificing existing GA positions.**

Re: Item 2, providing backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025

In Fall 2024, the [Cost of Attendance](#) for graduate students at UH Mānoa increased to \$25,214 per year. By Fall 2024, based on historical trends, around a third of GAs (~500 out of 1,500) were making the minimum designated pay step of Step 13 9-mo - equivalent to \$23,028 per year. This is also assuming that all GAs have been making at least the minimum pay step - without updated salary data from UH, which they have refused to share despite GAs being designated as public employees, we are unable to know for certain. This means that from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025, around a third of GAs were not being paid enough to attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to provide back pay to all GAs who were not paid at a wage that meets the Cost of Attendance.**

Re: Item 3, enacting a minimum pay step increase that covers the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i

It is common knowledge and lived experience of GAs that we are not paid enough to carry out the important labor that keeps the University of Hawai'i running. The truth is, not only are we paid less than we deserve, but our income level is criminally below basic living standards to simply survive and have shelter in Hawai'i.

According to [Hawai'i Community Development Authority](#) (HCDA)'s 2024 annual report to the State legislature, the Reserved Housing Program determines that a one-person household earning less than [\\$29,250](#) qualifies as "Extremely Low Income," the lowest of three low-income designations. Similar reports from the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) reflect these figures. The most updated minimum pay steps for UH Mānoa GAs (effective August 1, 2025) will be Step 15 (\$24,912) for 9-month contracts and Step 14 (\$28,026) for 11-month contracts, both falling substantially below the criteria for "Extremely Low Income." Additionally, since the Cost of Attendance for UH Mānoa is \$25,214 per year, the increased minimum pay step for a 9-mo contract will not cover these costs. In summary, the minimum pay step to be implemented in August is insufficient - **approximately a third of all Graduate Assistants will not be not paid enough to attend UH Mānoa nor live in Hawai'i.**

We also ask the BoR to consider that GAs are the **only** source of income for international GAs on F-1/J-1 student visas, lest they risk violating the terms of their working visas and deportation. The low wages GAs are paid indicate that UH administration assumes students with citizenship or legal permanent residents should take more than one job to make up the gap. EVERYONE should be paid to meet the cost of attendance and one job should be enough for all students regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Re: Item 4, implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step

GAs are not earning enough to afford UH's own new graduate student housing. The cheapest rental option (a single room in a four bedroom share) at [Hale Haukani](#), the new housing for grad students and faculty, will cost \$1,433/month on a 12 month lease (\$17,196/year). In this case, GAs under the minimum pay step of Step 15 9-mo (\$24,912 per year or \$2,076 per month) would be spending 69% of their entire pre-tax income just for housing. According to the HCDA, affordable housing for low and middle income workers/families should be **no more** than a third (33 percent) of their gross monthly income. The housing that UH ostensibly built for graduate

students will require that GAs making the minimum step pay twice the amount considered affordable for low income workers. And supposedly, these dorms are already the low-cost option - as this option will not house all GAs, many have to find alternative options for housing in O'ahu. According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Market Rents](#) database, efficiency rental fees in the 40th percentile for Honolulu County are up to \$1,887, a whopping 91% of monthly pay for GAs. **We demand that the BoR allocate funding for a housing subsidy for all GAs who are paid at the minimum pay step.**

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.

***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Judy Rohrer

Your Organization (optional)

UH Alumni

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

judy.rohrer@sbcglobal.net

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[UH BOT testimony.Rohrer.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 6:45 PM



March 19, 2025

Dear UH Board of Regents:

I am an alumnus of UH. My PhD is from the fantastic Political Science department. I was distressed to learn of UH's administrative response to the Feb 14 "Dear Colleague Letter" (DCL), and the consequences of that response, particularly that the Women's and LGBTQ Centers' websites were taken down.

Official response to the DCL has varied widely, but as far as I'm aware, UH was the first public university in a blue state to not just start identifying "suspicious words" on official websites, but to take down websites of student service centers. I'm not blaming those who made the decisions to take these actions at UH. I do think it's worth asking how their positions (of isolation/under-resourcing/precarity?) made them think that this was their best option.

My institution (Eastern Washington University) similarly instructed Deans to instruct chairs to go on "suspicious words" hunts, but the websites for our Pride Center and WAGE Center (our equivalent of a gender equity/women's center) remain live. It would be one thing if those "suspicious words" (which, as we all know, name vulnerable people, communities, and key interdisciplinary concepts) were being identified so that they could be lifted up, amplified, reproduced, shouted from the rooftops, but the intent of these word searches is the opposite—it's greasing the gears toward silencing and erasure.

Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto gave the keynote at the WGSS 50th anniversary breakfast earlier this month. She spoke with concern about the UH websites going dark and advised, "don't flinch... don't try to contort yourselves... it has impacts."

I hope you heed this caution. It's not a good look for UH to be one of the first institutions to rush to comply with the repression. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Judy Rohrer, Ph.D.

Director and Associate Professor, Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies

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Your Name (required)

Dianne Deauna

Your Organization (optional)

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

jdeauna@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of words and rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i.

I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this unusual, unprecedented, and important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language. UH should follow the "Multi-State Guidance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," issued by sixteen attorney generals, including our own, on February 13, 2025, on Executive Order 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." As one law firm explains, the attorneys general believe that "DEI and DEIA policies and practices are legally viable as they reduce litigation risk by proactively protecting against discriminatory conduct that violate the state and federal law." The Multi-State Guidance states, "President Trump is misleading the American people on purpose of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives," and that "employment discrimination is a serious and persistent problem in the United States."

The EOs 14173 and 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" imply the potential of "illegal DEI." However, DEI is not illegal. The OGC and President Hensel's approach

seems to be leading to the transformation of our historical positioning and pride in diversity, equity, and inclusion when there is no legal mandate. What is illegal under Title VII is discrimination on “the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin,” a law that UH proudly has upheld. Therefore, our websites should never have disappeared or been modified, listed as “under construction,” or have a 404 error. Below, I cite a few examples of content that has been removed or altered. Disappointing is the first on the list, where even the notice of the appointment of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Officer at the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene in November 2024, has disappeared.

<https://nursing.hawaii.edu/sondh-appoints-dr-donna-marie-palakiko-as-inaugural-deib-director/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/soestwp/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/oceanography/14297-2/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/huliamahi.html>

https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/es_jedi.html

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seed/> (The original definition of SEED was Office of Student Equity Excellence and Diversity)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seedideas/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentsuccess/departments/student-equity-excellence-and-diversity/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ovpae/academic-personnel/search-advocates/>

<https://socialsciences.manoa.hawaii.edu/college-life/our-campus/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Despite UH President’s statements that the decision to remove or modify content is independent, the OGC issued guidance for lower-level University employees in light of the EOs. The claim of autonomy of lower-level administrators (some who openly challenged this claim) to remove content seems insincere. The vagueness of the EOs and UH’s direction to “assess risk” has caused a hodgepodge of changes. For example, consider these statements in communication from upper level administrators to lower level ones that was shared publicly:

“OGC’s role is to 1) Identify whether something on the website could be viewed as unlawful (unlikely to have anything concrete in this category as the EOs are not law per se. 2) Identify areas of risk based on where federal policy as expressed in the EOs is likely to go.”

“If OGC identifies something as high risk it is important that leadership review the language and determine whether it can be expressed in a way that lowers the risk, either by using different language or eliminating non-essential content that is high risk. OGC is there to help them through that process and the process should be consultative and collaborative wherever possible. Changing may not bring us into compliance with EOs but helps us ensure we are using our terms thoughtfully and accurately rather than adhering to terminology that has a negative association from some parties.”

Clearly, these “points of clarification” present a contradiction to the guidance issued by our Attorney General. In another example, this email, which refers to the "Dear Colleague" letter which holds no legal weight, was sent to student employees and may be a violation of free speech:

“In order to be in compliance with the letter's deadline . . . we are being told by upper administration to review a lot of materials linked to our office and to focus on the terms "diversity", "equity", "inclusivity" and "accessibility". A few of the examples highlighted at yesterday's meeting to review and update include:

review and update bios on the website; review email signature and remove pronouns; review and update LinkedIn Profile (if you have one); update or remove signage around the office; update or remove social media posts (if linked to [this department] letterhead with no EEO statement; update mission statement.”

As BOR, you must agree it is wrong and unfair to send a "Dear Colleague" letter without any explanation as to its legal status or to ask UH personnel to consider changes to UH websites and their own social media. I also understand that there is a list of "forbidden" words sourced from the federal government which include "diversity," "cultural heritage," "ethnicity," "advocate," and "women" that is being shared on some of our campuses for what to remove from UH websites. The UH System leadership needs to affirm DEIA values and make this the single voice of UH rather than the misunderstanding and fear occurring across our campuses. The motion passed by the BOR that only permits President Hensel and the BOR Chair to speak on behalf of UH is inconsistent with our democratic values. It is silencing the members of our UH community, especially those lower-level administrators and staff who are accountable for altering or removing DEI language from our web pages and media.

I also request that President Hensel be clear in her presentation of the EOs 14173, 14151, as well as EO 14168 on DEI and Gender Ideology and distinguish them from the 'Dear Colleague' letter for our UH community and the wider state of Hawai'i. For example, John Hopkins University (JHU) lost \$800 million in USAID funding and is further threatened with the loss of federal grants and awards due to allegations of anti-semitism, yet the JHU remains steadfast in maintaining its websites and materials regarding DEI. In President Hensel's forum on March 13, 2025, she referred to JHU loss of funds but did not explain that JHU lost funds due to USAID cuts – NOT due to their commitment to DEI. Public university systems in Washington, Oregon, California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, remain committed and are supporting their campus in maintaining, and in some cases, bolstering diversity officers and DEI language. Our AG, state and federal legislatures, and allies across the US seem to recognize that taking any action in response to these convoluted EOs is the equivalent to siding with Trump's wrongful position that college enrollment and employment hires are not based on merit.

I appeal to your sense of democracy and to the State of Hawai'i's ethos which is based in aloha. Despite the forced annexations of the Kingdom of Hawai'i and the plantation history of these lands, we have remained a shining example of diversity and inclusion, as well as improving upon, rather than retreating, from equitable participation in education and employment. If the UH President issued statements of support and responsibility for DEI in response to the EOs, such as Presidents from campuses in other states are doing, it would limit the current fear and confusion and I would not have to testify for the restoration of UH websites, announcements, and offices. Professional organizations, legal advice, and articles in higher education papers, repeat the message that University Presidents need to maintain their commitment to DEI in their words, ideas, and public-facing media because capitulation will not save us from the attempts to destroy higher education as we know it.

The State of Hawai'i is a front runner in challenging the bias and vaguely worded EOs. Just last week, AG Lopez led another multi state coalition suing the Trump administration to stop dismantling the US Department of Education and protect students. The University of Hawai'i has the support of its state and federal legislatures, its AG and Governor, its faculty, staff, and students, and many of our civil servants to stand firm on our commitment to DEI. Why is it acting so rapidly, secretly, and contrarily and legitimizing through its actions the aforementioned EOs, all which are being legally challenged and will likely be determined unconstitutional?

I hope you will take steps to protect our campuses, students, faculty, and staff and the entire state of Hawai'i by supporting the restoration of UH's content and as BOR stand firm in our historical commitment to DEI. Mahalo.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 4:17 PM

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Your Name (required)

Marina Karides

Your Organization (optional)

University of Hawaii at UH Mānoa

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

mkarides@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[BOR.Testimony.Karides.3.19.25.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 4:49 PM

Aloha Board of Regents,

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of the UH Community and the State of Hawai'i. I am writing to urge you to take action to protect our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion content at UH. This is for students, but also faculty and staff who benefit when trainings, language, and attention is given to social and cultural differences, and the different, and uneven access, we have to higher education.

I write to you from the position of a first generation college student. In 1986 I was the first of my family to attend college, and my brother, a successful corporate lawyer, followed after me. A combination of Pell grants, student loans, and sheer willpower, I eventually graduated from a well ranked university in Boston. Before returning to graduate school to earn my PHD, the first step to gain the position of Professor at UH Mānoa, I worked for several years in K-12 education, in Taos, New Mexico and New Orleans, Louisiana where, despite the best efforts of teachers, much of the infrastructure and availability of books was subpar to say the least. I am also receipt of what was the prestigious NSF ADVANCE grant dedicated to diversifying and increasing women's representation in STEM. I gained the grant while being employed in the Sociology Department at UH Hilo. The grant, National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Partnership: Building Relationships to Increase Diversity and Gender Equity in Hawaii's Two-Year College System, No. 1725604, brought \$1,250,281 to the UH System. The original lead on the grant was Suzette Robinson, who then asked me to take on the PI role, because she realized that my commitment was truly in the interest of increasing access and orienting by calling people in, not out, towards building a healthy work environment. I attach the report we produced, like all universities, we have many struggles to realize diversity, equity, and inclusion across the UH System. Our institutional assessment focused on 9 of the 10 campuses.

This is why I urge you to hold the UH President accountable in the efforts being made and guided by OGC to reduce or disappear UH past and present content on what is truly a founding principle of this state more than any other, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. My research, studies of the representation of students by gender and race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity in STEM (and in college in general) demonstrate a distinct unevenness. DEI programs evolved to support access and also the clear effect that diversity has for improving science. Despite what the White House is doing and saying, science matters. And so do our values, and reflecting on our ideas, the reasons, we struggle for a cause. I am here writing you, and taking action on every front, because it is very clear for me what increased access to higher education has done for me and my family. This include my elderly parents, the care I can offer and their pride in arriving to the US with hopes for the future. And for my sons, a college graduate, and the other currently enrolled in college. How they approach college, and how did, out of struggle, are very different but the gains of an education founded on free speech, academic education, and the sharing of ideas, all of them, those that spark you and you agree with, and those that don't.

Finally, there are two matters I would like to draw to your attention. First, is my deep concern that the full information of how the Executive Orders are proceeding, and especially the challenges to them, and the recent "Dear Colleague" letter, is being presented to the UH

Community in a one-sided manner. For example, in her forum, 3/12, the President did not discuss the injunction on the EO, the leadership of our AG in challenging many of the EOs, or the stated position of our state and federal legislatures. Especially at the Federal level, Hawai‘i State officials are taking significant risks given the current climate, would not this then mean the UH System should follow suit? This is what is happening across campuses in Democratic states. I offer a list of examples at the end of my statement. Furthermore, the President referred to John Hopkins University, which although it lost USAID funding, is steadfast in maintaining its DEI content. The presentation was unclear. In fact, there is no indication when one reads or listens to UH leadership that national organization such as the AAUP, AAC&U, AAUW, State University Systems, R-1 campus, community colleges (see education for all) are fighting back in probably one of the most important struggles higher education has ever seen, or will see, if we don’t work together within Hawaii and across US state to fortify our commitment to DEI. I provide these links below.

My second arena of related concern is the mismatch between DEI expertise and holding lower level administrators, and our precious staff, responsible for deciding what content to change or remove from our digital presence, the virtual face of our university. I am sure you are aware that the staff across the UH System give and care for our students, frankly for all of us, beyond what they are compensated for. I know first-hand the stress many of them faced, especially after the “Dear Colleague” letter was sent to them without any explanation that is not a legal requirement. Personally, this counters what leadership looks like, in which responsibility, not just voice, should lie with those at the very top. The injunction on the DEI EO was removed on Friday 3/12/25. While it caused initial worry, I was notified, as part of an informal national ADVANCE network, where expertise in DEI lies, that according to the *National Law Review*, the reasoning was that the EOs were vague and as written, DEI programming could continue as they exist, and therefore an injunction was not needed, among other explanations for the reversal. And just yesterday NYU is under investigation, and though it is being wrongly targeted, not due to its DEI programs and websites, but because the White House is targeting PhD project, a non-profit focused on networking under-represented groups to pursue PhDs in business.

While there are moments when one takes a pass on the immediate struggle, and lives to fight another day. We are not in one of the moments, only a mounting resistance of universities and colleges with bold campus leaders will keep us living in a world of democratic values, a pluralistic society, and structured sharing of ideas rather than barbarianism. That simple values such as care and the support of young people who have had limited opportunities due to histories of inequality, migration, lands and access take away, or gender bias is being presented as inequity. DEI programs only began remedying the inequalities in education just twenty years ago, we have a long way to go. But as you know the State of Hawai‘i has shown educational leadership for its continental state before, we can do so again.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Marina Karides

Professor and Undergraduate Chair, Geography & Environment, UH Mānoa

For your reference:

<https://www.umass.edu/news/article/message-chancellor-supporting-community-through-changes-federal-policy>

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/multi-state-guidance-concerning-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-employment-initiatives/download>

<https://www.rutgers.edu/president/us-dept-of-education-dear-colleague-letter>
<https://diversity.rutgers.edu/>

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/transformation/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-hub/>
<https://www1.cuny.edu/sites/cunyufs/2025/02/21/cunys-mission-vision-and-values/>

<https://registrar.oregonstate.edu/student-emails/osus-enduring-commitment-inclusive-excellence#:~:text=OSU%20does%20not%20make%20admissions,new%20guidance%20and%20federal%20actions.>

<https://www.kuow.org/stories/incoming-uw-president-promises-continued-focus-on-dei-despite-trump-s-threats>
<https://www.wvu.edu/federal-administration-updates/update-us-department-educations-february-14-dear-colleague-letter>

"It is important to note that the “Dear Colleague” letter has no independent legal force and many legal experts view it as overreaching. It merely communicates the Trump administration’s intention to use the legal tools at its disposal to enforce its preferred expansive interpretation of the *SFFA* decision. Those tools include new guidance and regulations, which will govern any enforcement actions brought by the Office of Civil Rights".

<https://www.seattleu.edu/who-we-are/leadership/office-of-the-president/updates/2025/recent-federal-developments.php>

<https://diversity.uconn.edu>
<https://boardoftrustees.media.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3803/2025/02/2025-02-21-UConn-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-Agenda-Att.-Virtual-Revised.pdf>

Especially impressive powerpoint

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/state-policy/2025/01/27/grassroots-college-leader-group-resists-anti-dei>

How to Support:

<https://race.usc.edu/coalition/>
<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2025/03/03/how-support-faculty-during-chaos-opinion>

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00667-2?fbclid=IwY2xjawI11NtleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQRa0lpLPFKyUw9PS_9GkB8SOIRRFsIK0PK1CRenTuk8eAQcyXaHCUuo2A_aem_ZNhpX8gBxGaY-06gqBtfTA

Law and Injunctions:

<https://www.aaup.org/news/win-aaup-higher-ed-and-our-communities#:~:text=Last%20night%2C%20in%20a%20case,or%20forgo%20federal%20funding%20altogether.>”

<https://natlawreview.com/article/dei-litigation-whiplash-appellate-court-allows-government-move-forward-challenged>

<https://dailyevergreen.com/184610/news/wsuv-responds-to-the-trump-administrations-executive-orders/#:~:text=We've%20got%20programs%20in,is%20its%20land%20grant%20mission.>

<https://nsf.gov/resources.nsf.gov/files/Washington-v-Trump-NoticeOfCourtOrder-3-5-2025.pdf>

<https://natlawreview.com/article/federal-judge-denies-bid-stay-preliminary-injunction-blocking-president-trumps-dei>

<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/after-trump-admin-threats-aclu-sends-letter-of-support-to-universities-urging-them-to-protect-campus-speech>

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Your Name (required)

Aree Worawongwasu

Your Organization (optional)

Academic Labor United

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

aree@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

I submit this testimony to provide comments on the fiscal year operating budget request to the State legislature, demanding that the Board of Regents ensure that UH allocates funding to:

(1) ensure GA pay equity across the UH System

(2) provide backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025

(3) enact a minimum pay step increase that will cover the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i

(4) implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step.

Re: Item 1, ensuring GA pay equity across the UH System

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo offers the Masters in Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science, the only one of its kind in the United States. The highly unique program attracts a diverse set of students, some of whom are employed through Graduate Assistantships. Similar to their counterparts at UH Mānoa, these GAs teach undergraduate students, [perform outstanding research work that serves the communities of Big Island](#), and conduct administrative duties that ensures the smooth day to day operations of TCBES. We ask that the Board of Regents act to ensure that they receive just compensation for their work.

In the Spring of 2022, a minimum wage step increase was promised to GAs in the UH system at both campuses, but ultimately UH Hilo was forced to sacrifice a GA position to match the salary increase. Again in 2023, UH Mānoa received raises, and when GAs approached the administration inquiring about raises for GAs at UH Hilo, they were told that they would need to sacrifice another GA position to compensate if UH Hilo GA salaries were to increase to match. This Spring, it was announced that the minimum GA Pay Step will be increased: [Effective August 1, 2025, STEP 15 \(\\$24,912\) for 9-month and STEP 14 \(\\$28,026\) for 11-month](#). **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to ensure that UH Hilo GAs will receive pay step increases by August 1, 2025 equal to their UH Mānoa counterparts without sacrificing existing GA positions.**

Re: Item 2, providing backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025

In Fall 2024, the [Cost of Attendance](#) for graduate students at UH Mānoa increased to \$25,214 per year. By Fall 2024, based on historical trends, around a third of GAs (~500 out of 1,500) were making the minimum designated pay step of Step 13 9-mo - equivalent to \$23,028 per year. This is also assuming that all GAs have been making at least the minimum pay step - without updated salary data from UH, which they have refused to share despite GAs being designated as public employees, we are unable to know for certain. This means that from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025, around a third of GAs were not being paid enough to attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to provide back pay to all GAs who were not paid at a wage that meets the Cost of Attendance.**

Re: Item 3, enacting a minimum pay step increase that covers the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i

It is common knowledge and lived experience of GAs that we are not paid enough to carry out the important labor that keeps the University of Hawai'i running. The truth is, not only are we paid less than we deserve, but our income level is criminally below basic living standards to simply survive and have shelter in Hawai'i.

According to [Hawai'i Community Development Authority](#) (HCDA)'s 2024 annual report to the State legislature, the Reserved Housing Program determines that a one-person household earning less than [\\$29,250](#) qualifies as "Extremely Low Income," the lowest of three low-income designations. Similar reports from the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) reflect these figures. The most updated minimum pay steps for UH Mānoa GAs (effective August 1, 2025) will be Step 15 (\$24,912) for 9-month contracts and Step 14 (\$28,026) for 11-month contracts, both falling substantially below the criteria for "Extremely Low Income." Additionally, since the Cost of Attendance for UH Mānoa is \$25,214 per year, the increased minimum pay step for a 9-mo contract will not cover these costs. In summary, the minimum pay step to be implemented in August is insufficient - **approximately a third of all Graduate Assistants will not be not paid enough to attend UH Mānoa nor live in Hawai'i.**

We also ask the BoR to consider that GAs are the **only** source of income for international GAs on F-1/J-1 student visas, lest they risk violating the terms of their working visas and deportation. The low wages GAs are paid indicate that UH administration assumes students with citizenship or legal permanent residents should take more than one job to make up the gap. EVERYONE should be paid to meet the cost of attendance and one job should be enough for all students regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Re: Item 4, implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step

GAs are not earning enough to afford UH's own new graduate student housing. The cheapest rental option (a single room in a four bedroom share) at [Hale Haukani](#), the new housing for grad students and faculty, will cost \$1,433/month on a 12 month lease (\$17,196/year). In this case, GAs under the minimum

pay step of Step 15 9-mo (\$24,912 per year or \$2,076 per month) would be spending 69% of their entire pre-tax income just for housing. According to the HCDA, affordable housing for low and middle income workers/families should be **no more** than a third (33 percent) of their gross monthly income. The housing that UH ostensibly built for graduate students will require that GAs making the minimum step pay twice the amount considered affordable for low income workers. And supposedly, these dorms are already the low-cost option - as this option will not house all GAs, many have to find alternative options for housing in O'ahu. According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Market Rents](#) database, efficiency rental fees in the 40th percentile for Honolulu County are up to \$1,887, a whopping 91% of monthly pay for GAs. **We demand that the BoR allocate funding for a housing subsidy for all GAs who are paid at the minimum pay step.**

Me ke aloha,
Aree Worawongwasu
PhD Student, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Gender Justice Chair, Academic Labor United

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 5:44 PM

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.

***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Jordan Ando

Your Organization (optional)

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

andojando@gmail.com

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of words and rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i. I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this unusual, unprecedented, and important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language. UH should follow the "Multi-State Guidance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," issued by sixteen attorney generals, including our own, on February 13, 2025, on Executive Order 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." As one law firm explains, the attorneys general believe that "DEI and DEIA policies and practices are legally viable as they reduce litigation risk by proactively protecting against discriminatory conduct that violate the state and federal law." The Multi-State Guidance states, "President Trump is misleading the American people on purpose of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives," and that "employment discrimination is a serious and persistent problem in the United States."

The EOs 14173 and 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" imply the potential of "illegal DEI." However, DEI is not illegal. The OGC and President Hensel's approach seems to be leading to the transformation of our historical positioning and pride in diversity, equity, and inclusion when there is no legal mandate. What is illegal under Title VII is discrimination on "the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin," a law that UH proudly has upheld. Therefore, our

websites should never have disappeared or been modified, listed as “under construction,” or have a 404 error. Below, I cite a few examples of content that has been removed or altered. Disappointing is the first on the list, where even the notice of the appointment of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Officer at the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene in November 2024, has disappeared.

<https://nursing.hawaii.edu/sondh-appoints-dr-donna-marie-palakiko-as-inaugural-deib-director/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/soestwp/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/oceanography/14297-2/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/huliamahi.html>

https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/es_jedi.html

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seed/> (The original definition of SEED was Office of Student Equity Excellence and Diversity)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seedideas/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentsuccess/departments/student-equity-excellence-and-diversity/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ovpae/academic-personnel/search-advocates/>

<https://socialsciences.manoa.hawaii.edu/college-life/our-campus/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Despite UH President’s statements that the decision to remove or modify content is independent, the OGC issued guidance for lower-level University employees in light of the EOs. The claim of autonomy of lower-level administrators (some who openly challenged this claim) to remove content seems insincere. The vagueness of the EOs and UH’s direction to “assess risk” has caused a hodgepodge of changes. For example, consider these statements in communication from upper level administrators to lower level ones that was shared publicly:

“OGC’s role is to 1) Identify whether something on the website could be viewed as unlawful (unlikely to have anything concrete in this category as the EOs are not law per se. 2) Identify areas of risk based on where federal policy as expressed in the EOs is likely to go.”

“If OGC identifies something as high risk it is important that leadership review the language and determine whether it can be expressed in a way that lowers the risk, either by using different language or eliminating non-essential content that is high risk. OGC is there to help them through that process and the process should be consultative and collaborative wherever possible. Changing may not bring us into compliance with EOs but helps us ensure we are using our terms thoughtfully and accurately rather than adhering to terminology that has a negative association from some parties.”

Clearly, these “points of clarification” present a contradiction to the guidance issued by our Attorney General. In another example, this email, which refers to the “Dear Colleague” letter which holds no legal weight, was sent to student employees and may be a violation of free speech:

“In order to be in compliance with the letter’s deadline . . . we are being told by upper administration to review a lot of materials linked to our office and to focus on the terms “diversity”, “equity”, “inclusivity” and “accessibility”. A few of the examples highlighted at yesterday’s meeting to review and update include: review and update bios on the website; review email signature and remove pronouns; review and update LinkedIn Profile (if you have one); update or remove signage around the office; update or remove social media posts (if linked to [this department] letterhead with no EEO statement; update mission statement.”

As BOR, you must agree it is wrong and unfair to send a “Dear Colleague” letter without any explanation as to its legal status or to ask UH personnel to consider changes to UH websites and their own social media. I also understand that there is a list of “forbidden” words sourced from the federal government which include “diversity,” “cultural heritage,” “ethnicity,” “advocate,” and “women” that is being shared on some of our campuses for what to remove from UH websites. The UH System leadership needs to affirm DEIA values and make this the single voice of UH rather than the misunderstanding and fear occurring across our campuses. The motion passed by the BOR that only permits President Hensel and the BOR Chair to speak on behalf of UH is inconsistent with our democratic values. It is silencing the members of our UH community, especially those lower-level administrators and staff who are accountable for altering or removing DEI language from our web pages and media.

I also request that President Hensel be clear in her presentation of the EOs 14173, 14151, as well as EO 14168 on DEI and Gender Ideology and distinguish them from the ‘Dear Colleague’ letter for our UH community and the wider state of Hawai’i. For example, John Hopkins University (JHU) lost \$800 million in USAID funding and is further threatened with the loss of federal grants and awards due to allegations of anti-semitism, yet the JHU remains steadfast in maintaining its websites and materials regarding DEI. In President Hensel’s forum on March 13, 2025, she referred to JHU loss of funds but did not explain that JHU lost funds due to USAID cuts – NOT due to their commitment to DEI. Public university systems in Washington, Oregon, California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, remain committed and are supporting their campus in maintaining, and in some cases, bolstering diversity officers and DEI language. Our AG, state and federal legislatures, and allies across the US seem to recognize that taking any action in response to these convoluted EOs is the equivalent to siding with Trump’s wrongful position that college enrollment and employment hires are not based on merit. I appeal to your sense of democracy and to the State of Hawai’i’s ethos which is based in aloha. Despite the forced annexations of the Kingdom of Hawai’i and the plantation history of these lands, we have remained a shining example of diversity and inclusion, as well as improving upon, rather than retreating, from equitable participation in education and employment. If the UH President issued statements of support and responsibility for DEI in response to the EOs, such as Presidents from campuses in other states are doing, it would limit the current fear and confusion and I would not have to testify for the restoration of UH websites, announcements, and offices. Professional organizations, legal advice, and articles in higher education papers, repeat the message that University Presidents need to maintain their commitment to DEI in their words, ideas, and public-facing media because capitulation will not save us from the attempts to destroy higher education as we know it. The State of Hawai’i is a front runner in challenging the bias and vaguely worded EOs. Just last week, AG Lopez led another multi state coalition suing the Trump administration to stop dismantling the US Department of Education and protect students. The University of Hawai’i has the support of its state and federal legislatures, its AG and Governor, its faculty, staff, and students, and many of our civil servants to stand firm on our commitment to DEI. Why is it acting so rapidly, secretly, and contrarily and legitimizing through its actions the aforementioned EOs, all which are being legally challenged and will likely be determined unconstitutional? I hope you will take steps to protect our campuses, students, faculty, and staff and the entire state of Hawai’i by supporting the restoration of UH’s content and as BOR stand firm in our historical commitment to DEI. Mahalo

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 6:44 PM

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.

***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Arthur Kastler

Your Organization (optional)

Kapiolani CC student

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

akastler@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of words and rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i. I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this unusual, unprecedented, and important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language. UH should follow the "Multi-State Guidance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," issued by sixteen attorney generals, including our own, on February 13, 2025, on Executive Order 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." As one law firm explains, the attorneys general believe that "DEI and DEIA policies and practices are legally viable as they reduce litigation risk by proactively protecting against discriminatory conduct that violate the state and federal law." The Multi-State Guidance states, "President Trump is misleading the American people on purpose of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives," and that "employment discrimination is a serious and persistent problem in the United States."

Please follow the guidelines set forth by the Attorneys General.

As a student at a community college I am extremely concerned.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 8:46 PM

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Your Name (required)

Armando Molina Gómez

Your Organization (optional)

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

amolitag@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[Testimony on Agenda Item VII.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 10:14 PM

March 19, 2025

TO: University of Hawai'i Board of Regents

FROM: Armando Molina Gómez (graduate student, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)

Comments only: Agenda Item VII.G. Legislative Update

(specifically in regard to HB 300 - Relating to the State Budget and SB 473 Relating to the State Budget)

Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

I submit this testimony to provide comments on the fiscal year operating budget request to the State legislature, demanding that the Board of Regents ensure that UH allocates funding to:

- (1) ensure GA pay equity across the UH System**
- (2) provide backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025**
- (3) enact a minimum pay step increase that will cover the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i**
- (4) implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step.**

Re: Item 1, ensuring GA pay equity across the UH System

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo offers the Masters in Tropical Conservation Biology and Environmental Science, the only one of its kind in the United States. The highly unique program attracts a diverse set of students, some of whom are employed through Graduate Assistantships. Similar to their counterparts at UH Mānoa, these GAs teach undergraduate students, [perform outstanding research work that serves the communities of Big Island](#), and conduct administrative duties that ensures the smooth day to day operations of TCBES. We ask that the Board of Regents act to ensure that they receive just compensation for their work.

In the Spring of 2022, a minimum wage step increase was promised to GAs in the UH system at both campuses, but ultimately UH Hilo was forced to sacrifice a GA position to match the salary increase. Again in 2023, UH Mānoa received raises, and when GAs approached the administration inquiring about raises for GAs at UH Hilo, they were told that they would need to sacrifice another GA position to compensate if UH Hilo GA salaries were to increase to match. This Spring, it was announced that the minimum GA Pay Step will be increased: [Effective August 1, 2025, STEP 15 \(\\$24,912\) for 9-month and STEP 14 \(\\$28,026\) for 11-month](#). **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to ensure that UH Hilo GAs will receive pay step increases by August 1, 2025 equal to their UH Mānoa counterparts without sacrificing existing GA positions.**

Re: Item 2, providing backpay for GAs who were not paid the Cost of Attendance for Fall 2024 and Spring 2025

In Fall 2024, the [Cost of Attendance](#) for graduate students at UH Mānoa increased to \$25,214 per year. By Fall 2024, based on historical trends, around a third of GAs (~500 out of 1,500) were making the minimum designated pay step of Step 13 9-mo - equivalent to \$23,028 per year. This is also assuming that all GAs have been making at least the minimum pay step - without updated salary data from UH, which they have refused to share despite GAs being designated as public employees, we are unable to know for certain. This means that from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025, around a third of GAs were not being paid enough to attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. **We demand that the Board of Regents allocate State funding to provide back pay to all GAs who were not paid at a wage that meets the Cost of Attendance.**

Re: Item 3, enacting a minimum pay step increase that covers the Cost of Attendance set by UH, along with the basic living standards in Hawai'i

It is common knowledge and lived experience of GAs that we are not paid enough to carry out the important labor that keeps the University of Hawai'i running. The truth is, not only are we paid less than we deserve, but our income level is criminally below basic living standards to simply survive and have shelter in Hawai'i.

According to [Hawai'i Community Development Authority](#) (HCDA)'s 2024 annual report to the State legislature, the Reserved Housing Program determines that a one-person household earning less than [\\$29,250](#) qualifies as "Extremely Low Income," the lowest of three low-income designations. Similar reports from the [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) reflect these figures. The most updated minimum pay steps for UH Mānoa GAs (effective August 1, 2025) will be Step 15 (\$24,912) for 9-month contracts and Step 14 (\$28,026) for 11-month contracts, both falling substantially below the criteria for "Extremely Low Income." Additionally, since the Cost of Attendance for UH Mānoa is \$25,214 per year, the increased minimum pay step for a 9-mo contract will not cover these costs. In summary, the minimum pay step to be implemented in August is insufficient - **approximately a third of all Graduate Assistants will not be not paid enough to attend UH Mānoa nor live in Hawai'i.**

We also ask the BoR to consider that GAs are the **only** source of income for international GAs on F-1/J-1 student visas, lest they risk violating the terms of their working visas and deportation. The low wages GAs are paid indicate that UH administration assumes students with citizenship or legal permanent residents should take more than one job to make up the gap. EVERYONE should be paid to meet the cost of attendance and one job should be enough for all students regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

Re: Item 4, implement a housing subsidy for GAs paid the minimum pay step

GAs are not earning enough to afford UH's own new graduate student housing. The cheapest rental option (a single room in a four bedroom share) at [Hale Haukani](#), the new housing for grad students and faculty, will cost \$1,433/month on a 12 month lease (\$17,196/year). In this case, GAs under the minimum pay step of Step 15 9-mo (\$24,912 per year or \$2,076 per month) would be spending 69% of their entire pre-tax income just for housing. According to the HCDA, affordable housing for low and middle income workers/families should be **no more** than a third (33 percent) of their gross monthly income. The housing that UH ostensibly built for graduate students will require that GAs

making the minimum step pay twice the amount considered affordable for low income workers. And supposedly, these dorms are already the low-cost option - as this option will not house all GAs, many have to find alternative options for housing in O'ahu. According to the [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Market Rents](#) database, efficiency rental fees in the 40th percentile for Honolulu County are up to \$1,887, a whopping 91% of monthly pay for GAs. **We demand that the BoR allocate funding for a housing subsidy for all GAs who are paid at the minimum pay step.**

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.

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Your Name (required)

Kaiqing Su

Your Organization (optional)

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

ksu4@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Aloha members of the Board of Regents,

My name is Kaiqing Su, I am a graduate student in the Political Science department. I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of words and rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i. I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this unusual, unprecedented, and important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language.

As a student, it is concerning to me that the President Wendy Hensel had to repeatedly state that there was no direct order to remove or modify content, meanwhile some of us learned that the OGC issued guidance for lower-level University employees in light of the EOs (i.e. EO 14173 and EO 14151). The transparency that the President claimed to commit to is compromised by the technicality of terms like "recommendations" and "guidance." The vagueness of the EOs and UH's direction to "assess risk" has caused a hodgepodge of changes. This is a huge and unfair burden placed on lower-level university employees. It seems like the President's expertise in law has blinded her from seeing how power works and how indirect inaction has direct consequences. Let alone that DEI is not illegal. The UH

System leadership needs to affirm DEIA values and make this the single voice of UH rather than the misunderstanding and fear occurring across our campuses.

I am voicing these concerns not because I don't think law is important; but that in this case, law is actively manipulated and abused by the Trump Administration. Throughout history, laws are continuously challenged to progress, especially in University spaces, by students. It was disappointing to hear how President Hensel dismissed students' concern with her ethical stance to be mere "intellectual arguments" at the Open Forum. That response was patronizing and disrespectful, with the assumption that us as students have no way to comprehend the importance of "jobs" or "real problems," despite the fact that myself as a Graduate Assistant hold an insanely underpaid job and face "real problems" of surviving in urban Honolulu daily.

While President Hensel and the OGC's failure to take responsibility for the removal of DEIA content, initiatives, and programs is only one aspect of their responses toward, Trump Administration's EOs, their lack of leadership is worrisome. One can expect them to fail to protect freedom of speech, the right to peacefully protest from wrongful accusations of "anti-semitism", and the vulnerable UH migrant communities from ICE raids in the name of "following the law," while disregarding, for example, the affirmative guidance provided by the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU)'s open letter, which has yet been circulated in the wider UH community. I believe the University's conservative compliance to these EOs creates precisely what President Hensel called "a false sense of security" in her Open Forum address. I deeply empathize with President Wendy Hensel as a newcomer in Hawai'i holding a new and challenging position. And similar sentiments go to the Board of Regents. However, in these unprecedented times, it is unsatisfying to hear "reasonable people would agree to disagree," while evidently, the disagreements are neither equal nor democratic. I hope that both BoR and the President can open up more venues of communication to engage in frequent and sincere conversations with students, faculty and staff of the university.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 11:14 PM

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Your Name (required)

Erik Horn

Your Organization (optional)

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

erikhorn808@outlook.com

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Support

Your Testimony/Comments

On

HB 548 HD1 (Garrett)

RELATING TO THE ACQUISITION OF THE SAINT FRANCIS SCHOOL CAMPUS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA

The fact that 11 acres of land was for sale, adjacent to the landlocked University of Manoa, and was not obtained by the State for the University, was a disgraceful failure of forward planning by the public & elected officials in position at the time. These are opportunities that can not be missed. Allowing this site to be redeveloped and subdivided outside of the University's control would be an unacceptable outcome.

I support the board's position to support legislation which sorts the finances necessary for the University of Hawaii to acquire this critical contiguous expansion room.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 19, 2025 at 10:54 PM

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.

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Your Name (required)

Erik Horn

Your Organization (optional)

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

erikhorn808@outlook.com

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

VII.G. Legislative Update

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

On

"HB 1494 HD3 (Garrett) RELATING TO SPORTS FACILITIES

Lapses appropriations of general obligation bond funds previously authorized for the planning, design, and construction of a stadium in Halawa by the Stadium Authority..."

A few points in brief, which I would advise the board to get in touch with me for further explanation.

1. \$350 million has been previously allocated to the UH Stadium. This should be viewed through the lens as legislative willingness to support the UH athletic department with \$350m

1.a. The stadium at UH Manoa is enough for the time being.

1.b. Interest Rates are high. For instance, UH Federal Credit Union (UHFCU) will go 4.0% on certificates.

1.c. The Big Ten and SEC athletic conferences will start revenue sharing at \$20.5m

1.d. The Mountain West, and similar leftovers, does not.

1.e. Instead of building a second stadium, or seeing the money revoked by the state, \$350 million deposited at UHFCU at 4.0% is \$14 million dollars annual interest. And you still have your principle of \$350 million at the end of the day.

1.f. This is closer to BIG 10 - SEC money than to Mountain West. It is enough to field a highly competitive team, keep local talent at home, and monies paid to those players recirculating in the local economy.

1.g. Spend the money on an endowment, not on a second stadium.

1.h. **You the board need to change position from comments only to advocating to keep this \$350 million as part of an UH Athletics endowment.**

2. The UH Board needs to advocate for, and frankly do whatever measures, even extreme, it may take to secure the bag and gain complete control over the Halawa Redevelopment Site. This must be done to secure the future general endowment for the University and to begin building national and international centers of excellence within UH Manoa's academic offerings.
- 2.i. Finances
- 2.i.i. It's no secret that building houses and apartments in Hawaii earns money. It's why developers stay in business despite a poor business and regulatory climate for building new housing in Hawaii.
- 2.i.i.1. example: Howard Hughes 2024 Annual Report - \$6 billion in total sales on 60 acres.
- 2.i.i.2. "the Company completed Victoria Place—a 349-unit condominium development that is 100% pre-sold. Unit closings are expected to commence in November, contributing to approximately \$760 million of anticipated condo sales revenue in the fourth quarter with approximately 27.5% gross margins"
- 2.i.i.2.a. This is \$212 million gross profit.
- 2.i.i.3. Backwards calculate this, you have roughly \$1.65 billion of gross profit across the Ward Village development.
- 2.i.ii. Ward Village and NASED site are of comparable scope. 60 and 98 acres respectively.
- 2.i.ii.4. Per DBEDT's HCDA "General Growth's "Ward Neighborhood" master plan envisioned up to 4,300 homes in 20 buildings, space for 400 retailers, three landscaped pedestrian plazas and 700,000 square feet of industrial space."
- 2.i.ii.5. NASED, at Gov. Green's last suggestions, aprox 4500.
- 2.i.ii.6. We can pretty well see that NASED is worth about \$1.65 billion of profit.
- 2.i.ii.6.b. Why should \$1.65 billion be given to developers when it can be given to the University of Hawaii and the future of the Keiki of Hawaii instead?
- 2.i.iii. University of Hawaii endowment is at \$496 million (2023). Adding \$1.65 billion to that number would quadruple it.
- 2.i.iii.7. A \$2 billion UH Endowment from seizing control over NASED profits would be \$2b/ 20k enrollment = \$100k / student.
- 2.i.iii.8. \$100k / student in endowment would place UH-Manoa at 7th (Public Schools) in an 18 team conference like the BIG 10.
- 2.i.iv. **Realistically, in the best and highest use, 98 acres in walking distance to a train station could support 18-20k housing units. That would render closer to a transformational \$6.6 billion addition for the UH endowment.**
- 2.i.iv.9. \$7.1b total for \$355k per student.
- 2.j. Global Level Academic Centers of Excellence
- 2.j.v. Total control over NASED means the UH Architecture Department and Department of Urban and Regional Planning can be relied upon to directly design and manage building of the redevelopment district. Likely in oversight of a traditional general contractor.
- 2.j.v.10. This kind of hands on learning, with control over real projects, is found no where. UH-Manoa having it immediately places it in a league of 1.
- 2.j.v.11. Profits generated from this project allow the scheme to roll forward to future developments and hands on learning.
- 2.j.vi. A built out NASED is scheduled and authorized to have Residences, a Hotel, (Current Stadium), and a Mall.
- 2.j.vi.12. The Travel Industry Management can gain direct control over the resulting hotel. This provides hands on management and work experience to the students of the program that will be unable to be offered anywhere else. No other TIM school will have an actual operating hotel under it's control.
- 2.j.vi.13. The Shidler College of Business can gain direct control of the mall, or joint control with Athletic Department.

2.j.vi.13.c. This gives Business students hands on experience with negotiating business lease agreements and other contracts, resolving disputes, and managing day to day operations of actual business ventures. A level of academic offering not available elsewhere.

2.j.vi.14. The UH Athletic Department can gain direct control over the resulting stadium, or joint control with College of Business.

2.j.vi.14.d. This provides the athletic department with financial planning and scheduling certainty from having control over it's own venue. It allows for a responsive chain of command which will act in the best interests of UH sports programs directly.

2.k. **The board must be more proactive and vocal about needing complete control over the NASED, now Halawa Redevelopment District, in order to catalyze transformational and generational change for excellence at the University of Hawaii. Failure to move with such energy will trap us only in decades more of deferred maintenance and mediocrity. That would be an unacceptable outcome.**

In previous years under COVID lockdown I had prepared longer, more in depth analysis of these issues. Due to the nature of college conference athletics, some of those numbers are best kept off the public record initially. Please reach out to me at the email used to submit this comment if you wish to see those.

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

No Response

Submission Date

March 20, 2025 at 12:11 AM

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.

***All written testimony submitted are public documents. Therefore, any testimony submitted is public information and will be posted on the board's website.*

Your Name (required)

Sarah Popenhagen

Your Organization (optional)

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

spopen@hawaii.edu

Board of Regents Agenda Item (required)

IV. Report of the President

Your Position (required)

Comments Only

Your Testimony/Comments

Your Testimony (pdf or word)

[testimony.pdf](#)

Submission Date

March 20, 2025 at 2:09 AM

Aloha Board of Regents,

I am writing with serious concerns regarding what appears to be the University of Hawai'i's (UH) President Hensel preemptive capitulation to the authoritarian and inarticulate demands by the White House on higher education. At UH this has led to the censoring of digital content via guidance provided by the Office of General Counsel (OGC) including the removal of certain words as well as rendering websites unavailable across campuses, colleges, and departments and vital services of the University of Hawai'i.

I request that the Board of Regents (BOR) intervene in this important historical moment and hold UH to account by restoring our websites and language. I request that UH follow the "Multi-State Guidance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," issued by sixteen attorney generals, including our own, on February 13, 2025, on Executive Order 14173, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity." As one law firm explains, the attorneys general believe that "DEI and DEIA policies and practices are legally viable as they reduce litigation risk by proactively protecting against discriminatory conduct that violate the state and federal law." The Multi-State Guidance states, "President Trump is misleading the American people on purpose of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility initiatives," and that "employment discrimination is a serious and persistent problem in the United States."

The EOs 14173 and 14151, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing" imply the potential of "illegal DEI." However, DEI is not illegal. The OGC and President Hensel's approach seems to be leading to the transformation of our historical positioning and pride in diversity, equity, and inclusion when there is no legal mandate. What is illegal under Title VII is discrimination on "the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin," a law that UH proudly has upheld. Therefore, our websites should never have disappeared or been modified, listed as "under construction," or have a 404 error. Below, I cite a few examples of content that has been removed or altered. Disappointing is the first on the list, where even the notice of the appointment of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Officer at the School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene in November 2024, has disappeared.

<https://nursing.hawaii.edu/sondh-appoints-dr-donna-marie-palakiko-as-inaugural-deib-director/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/soestwp/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/oceanography/14297-2/>

<https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/huliamahi.html>

https://www.soest.hawaii.edu/earthsciences/jedi/es_jedi.html

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seed/> (The original definition of SEED was Office of Student Equity Excellence and Diversity)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/seedideas/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentsuccess/departments/student-equity-excellence-and-diversity/>

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/ovpac/academic-personnel/search-advocates/>

<https://socialsciences.manoa.hawaii.edu/college-life/our-campus/diversity-and-inclusion/>

Despite UH President's statements that the decision to remove or modify content is independent, the OGC issued guidance for lower-level University employees in light of the EOs. The claim of autonomy of lower-level administrators (some of whom openly challenged this

claim) to remove content seems insincere. The vagueness of the EOs and UH's direction to "assess risk" has caused a hodgepodge of changes. For example, consider these statements in communication from upper level administrators to lower level ones that was shared publicly:

"OGC's role is to 1) Identify whether something on the website could be viewed as unlawful (unlikely to have anything concrete in this category as the EOs are not law per se. 2) Identify areas of risk based on where federal policy as expressed in the EOs is likely to go."

"If OGC identifies something as high risk it is important that leadership review the language and determine whether it can be expressed in a way that lowers the risk, either by using different language or eliminating non-essential content that is high risk. OGC is there to help them through that process and the process should be consultative and collaborative wherever possible. Changing may not bring us into compliance with EOs but helps us ensure we are using our terms thoughtfully and accurately rather than adhering to terminology that has a negative association from some parties."

Clearly, these "points of clarification" present a contradiction to the guidance issued by our Attorney General. In another example, this email, which refers to the "Dear Colleague" letter which holds no legal weight, was sent to student employees and may be a violation of free speech:

"In order to be in compliance with the letter's deadline . . . we are being told by upper administration to review a lot of materials linked to our office and to focus on the terms "diversity", "equity", "inclusivity" and "accessibility". A few of the examples highlighted at yesterday's meeting to review and update include:

review and update bios on the website; review email signature and remove pronouns; review and update LinkedIn Profile (if you have one); update or remove signage around the office; update or remove social media posts (if linked to [this department] letterhead with no EEO statement; update mission statement."

As BOR, you must agree it is wrong and unfair to send a "Dear Colleague" letter without any explanation as to its legal status or to ask UH personnel to consider changes to UH websites and their own social media. I also understand that there is a list of "forbidden" words sourced from the federal government which include "diversity," "cultural heritage," "ethnicity," "advocate," and "women" that is being shared on some of our campuses for what to remove from UH websites. The UH System leadership needs to affirm DEIA values and make this the single voice of UH rather than the misunderstanding and fear occurring across our campuses. The motion passed by the BOR that only permits President Hensel and the BOR Chair to speak on behalf of UH is inconsistent with our democratic values. It is silencing the members of our UH community, especially those lower-level administrators and staff who are accountable for altering or removing DEI language from our web pages and media.

I also request that President Hensel be clear in her presentation of the EOs 14173, 14151, as well as EO 14168 on DEI and Gender Ideology and distinguish them from the 'Dear Colleague' letter for our UH community and the wider state of Hawai'i. For example, John Hopkins University (JHU) lost \$800 million in USAID funding and is further threatened with the loss of

federal grants and awards due to allegations of anti-semitism, yet the JHU remains steadfast in maintaining its websites and materials regarding DEI. In President Hensel's forum on March 13, 2025, she referred to JHU loss of funds but did not explain that JHU lost funds due to USAID cuts – NOT due to their commitment to DEI. Public university systems in Washington, Oregon, California, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York, remain committed and are supporting their campus in maintaining, and in some cases, bolstering diversity officers and DEI language. Our AG, state and federal legislatures, and allies across the US seem to recognize that taking any action in response to these convoluted EOs is the equivalent to siding with Trump's wrongful position that college enrollment and employment hires are not based on merit.

I appeal to your sense of democracy and to the State of Hawai'i's ethos which is based in aloha. Despite the forced annexations of the Kingdom of Hawai'i and the plantation history of these lands, we have remained a shining example of diversity and inclusion, as well as improving upon, rather than retreating, from equitable participation in education and employment. If the UH President issued statements of support and responsibility for DEI in response to the EOs, such as Presidents from campuses in other states are doing, it would limit the current fear and confusion and I would not have to testify for the restoration of UH websites, announcements, and offices. Professional organizations, legal advice, and articles in higher education papers, repeat the message that University Presidents need to maintain their commitment to DEI in their words, ideas, and public-facing media because capitulation will not save us from the attempts to destroy higher education as we know it. I urge you to consider how our actions in these unprecedented times will be viewed by history, and what that means for each of us, personally, as well as the legacy and reputation of the university as a whole.

The State of Hawai'i is a front runner in challenging the bias and vaguely worded EOs. Just last week, AG Lopez led another multi state coalition suing the Trump administration to stop dismantling the US Department of Education and protect students. The University of Hawai'i has the support of its state and federal legislatures, its AG and Governor, its faculty, staff, and students, and many of our civil servants to stand firm on our commitment to DEI. Why is it acting so rapidly, secretly, and contrarily and legitimizing through its actions the aforementioned EOs, all which are being legally challenged and will likely be determined unconstitutional?

I hope you will take steps to protect our campuses, students, faculty, and staff and the entire state of Hawai'i by supporting the restoration of UH's content and as BOR stand firm in our historical commitment to DEI. Mahalo.



Oral Testimony in written form

1 message

Mahinaokalani Robbins <mahinaok@hawaii.edu>
To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Thu, Mar 20, 2025 at 11:16 AM

Aloha,

There was a terrible echo that I could not ameliorate on my end so it was hard for me to concentrate and speak. I apologize for not staying within the time limit. I copied and pasted my testimony below.-->

Aloha mai kakou. I am a graduate student at UH Manoa and I am truly grateful to be speaking before you all this morning. I am testifying regarding the UH administration's reaction to federal guidance against diversity efforts at universities. I truly mean what I am about to say with deep respect and aloha, out of concern for this university and this community. I appreciate you all having this space for public testimony on these contentious executive orders.

President Hensel, you have repeated that you have not ordered any department to change specific language but are having each department individually assess the risk they are willing to take and reword language in public facing media to minimize that risk. I understand why you did this and do see the reasoning behind this conservative approach because you all believe that this will in some way protect us.

But I am very concerned about the mid-level managers who make up the leadership of those departments, the faculty and staff you and the Office of General Counsel have given the burden of assessing risk. Our faculty and staff do not have the legal expertise that you have access to, nor the entire power of the institution to back them up if they do not want to alter language based on their personal morals.

I know you all have said that reasonable people may disagree, but is it reasonable to expect lower-level staff and faculty to be making decisions that they believe impact the existence of their jobs and livelihoods? People will continue to react out of fear and confusion and potentially will inflict harm they did not mean to. I am sure you have heard anecdotes of the mistakes made by misguided self-policing, and this happened because of your guidance. All I ask is that you try to see this moment from the perspective of the people within the departments, whom you gave this burden. I believe assessing the risk is your kuleana, not theirs.

So, you may ask: what do you want UH to do? Order everyone to remove words like 'diversity' so the burden is on the UH administration and not the mid-level leaders? No, I do not. A few weeks ago, the University of Pennsylvania erased dozens of DEI initiatives, programs and committees online to review the material to make sure they were compliant with the executive orders. This is a conservative approach, one that reminds me a lot of what is happening here at UH. But this did not save them from the Trump administration's attempt to rescind 175 million dollars from Penn, of which they announced yesterday. I know you may disagree, but I truly fail to see how removing words like 'diversity' will protect UH, an institution with a significant population of indigenous students and students of color. I hope you can see that this conservative approach is not the answer.

Mahalo for letting me speak and again, I meant what I said with respect and aloha.

Mahalo,
Mahina

Mahinaokalani Robbins | she/her
Research Assistant, PhD Student | [website](#)
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Department of Earth Sciences