



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony presented before the
House Committee on Finance
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HB 1457: RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the House Committee on Finance:

House Bill 1457 proposes a revision to Chapter 304A of the Hawai'i Revised Statutes by adding a section requiring the University of Hawai'i (UH) to report annually to the Director of Finance: a) the number of undergraduate students at UH who have completed the number of credits necessary to obtain a bachelor's degree but have not yet graduated; and b) the number of undergraduate students who have not declared a major after having completed a specified number of credits. Under the proposed change in statute, the Director of Finance would then assess the University a cost associated with the numbers of these identified students, and require the University to transfer the assessed amount to the state's general fund.

The University of Hawai'i opposes HB 1457. We would like to point out that students have many complex reasons for taking extra time to graduate. These may range from family responsibilities, to job-related choices, academic and financial issues, and other reasons. We are unsure about the intent of HB 1457 regarding these matters.

Second, the goal of the University's Hawai'i Graduation Initiative announced by President Greenwood a year ago is to increase the number of students earning certificates and 2- and 4-year degrees by 25% by 2015. A key strategy in the Initiative and a critical factor in reaching this goal is that students graduate on time and on target with required but not excessive number of credits.

The University has taken a number of concrete steps to meet graduation goals and to hold ourselves accountable. First, in 2008 the University of Hawai'i established its *Strategic Outcomes and Performance Measures, 2008-2015* intended to meet the higher education needs of the state. These strategic priorities are measured by indicators such as the numbers of degrees and certificates awarded. Second, we are part of several cross-state alliances that are working together to better apply data, student services, and academic practices to tackle the nationwide problem of helping students graduate on time. We are making significant progress.

As part of the multi-state Achieving the Dream project the UH Community Colleges have developed programs that assist underprepared students in remedial programs to progress more rapidly toward college credit-bearing courses. The success of our community colleges is tied to the success of our four year campuses. In October 2010 Hawai'i was

selected as one of eight states to participate in a Complete College America Academy based on an assessment of our campuses and the state's readiness to improve college completion. UH campuses applied the practices they examined at the Academy and have instituted a number of changes aimed at improving time and credits to degree and increasing graduation numbers, for example:

- Ensured that it is possible to complete a bachelor's degree in 4 years by reviewing and adjusting credit requirements for graduation.
- Provide students with degree check sheets with clear pathways to graduating on time, and follow up with degree audits.
- Instituted smooth articulation and transfer mechanisms between community colleges and 4-year campuses.
- Reduced summer school tuition so that more students take advantage of summer school.
- Increased federal and UH financial aid to help students continue their studies.
- Developed a number of additional cross-campus degree programs so that students who start at a community college campus can continue seamlessly at a four-year campus and earn a bachelors degree.

We are launching a *Fifteen to Finish* campaign in order to communicate the message to students, their parents, and our community that students can complete a bachelor's degree in four years if they take fifteen credits a semester (which costs the same as twelve credits a semester at the four year campuses).

The University recognizes the concern raised by HB 1457 and understands the cost to the state when students take longer than four years to graduate or accumulate more credits than are required for completing a bachelor's degree. In addition, we understand the lost opportunity cost to students who remain in college instead of graduating on time, starting careers, and earning income.

We are taking active steps to encourage students to take fifteen credits a semester and complete degrees on time and on target. We respectfully request that the legislature not penalize our campuses through an assessment by the Department of Finance in the manner proposed by HB1457.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to testify.