



SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

The Honorable Laura H. Thielen, Chair
The Honorable Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

S.B. NO. 3157, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGES.

Hearing: Tuesday, February 11, 2020, 2:45 p.m.

The Office of the Auditor takes **no position** on S.B. No. 3157 and offers the following comments.

The bill directs our office to conduct a comprehensive performance audit of the University of Hawai'i (UH) Community College system that, at a minimum, assesses the system's programs, activities, policies, and procedures relating to enrollment, hiring practices, tenure, and building and facilities maintenance.

We have concerns about our ability to assess all the identified areas considering our staffing resources, the time in which we would have to complete the audit, and the possibility that each UH community college campus may require separate analysis based upon its unique programs, activities, policies, or procedures. We strongly suggest that the Legislature limit the scope of the audit and identify the programs or activities that it wants assessed within the timeline to ensure that we report on those issues that the Legislature is most interested in having us examine.

Government auditing standards require us to have sufficient staff, resources, and time to conduct an audit that is thorough enough to ensure that any audit findings are based on sufficient and appropriate evidence. The bill's current language will require us to eliminate certain programs and activities to ensure the audit is narrow enough to be completed in the time envisioned and exacting enough to ensure any audit findings are based on accurate and complete information.

Thank you for considering our testimony related to S.B. No. 3157. We are committed to providing meaningful audit findings that address the issues identified by the Legislature and are available to work with the Committee on the language of this bill.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Government Operations
and
Senate Committee on Higher Education
February 11, 2020 at 2:45 p.m.

by
Kalbert K. Young
Vice President for Budget and Finance/Chief Financial Officer
University of Hawai'i System
and
Erika Lacro
Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

SB 3157 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Chairs Thielen and Kim, Vice Chairs Inouye and Kidani, and members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on SB 3157. While the University of Hawai'i (University) recognizes that audits can be beneficial in helping to evaluate and validate processes, and where necessary, audits can provide value in identifying areas for improvement or best practices, the University feels that a comprehensive performance audit of the community college system is not necessary at this time.

Each of our community college campuses went through a very rigorous and comprehensive accreditation evaluation by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). The ACCJC is the accrediting body that accredits all community and junior colleges in California, Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands. As you know, accreditation is a system by which an institution evaluates itself in accordance with standards of good practice regarding mission, goals, and objectives; the appropriateness, sufficiency, and utilization of resources; the usefulness, integrity, and effectiveness of its processes; and the extent to which it is achieving its intended student achievement and student learning outcomes at levels acceptable for higher education. It is a process by which accreditors provide students and the public with assurances of institutional integrity and effectiveness and educational quality. Following an on-site visit in October 2018, all campuses with the exception of Kapi'olani Community College (KapCC), received reaffirmation for the maximum seven-year period. KapCC received reaffirmation for 18 months with a Follow-up Report due next month. So the University of Hawai'i Community Colleges is already subjected to a thorough evaluation of its academic quality and institutional effectiveness, student learning programs and support programs, resources, including human resources,

physical resources, technology resources, and financial resources, and leadership and governance.

It is the University's understanding that this bill was prompted by concerns raised by students at a community college campus, and we have already set up meetings with students to discuss their concerns. We are hopeful that issues students might have with the Administration at any of our community college campuses can be addressed without the need for an audit.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

To: Committee on Government Operation
Committee on Higher Education

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 3157

From: Helen Nishimoto (recently retired Professor)

I have a 25 year history with Hawaii Community College that dates back to the early 1990s, when I first began college as a single mother with four daughters. I worked there as a tutor while moving on to other colleges, and eventually obtaining a Master's degree. Eventually, after years of effort, I was hired as a faculty at Hawaii Community College. We were an amazing college in those years; we honored diversity, there was integrity, there was academic freedom in teaching and learning, and there was accountability.

Things changed. EEO seemed to have been lost in the days of Rockne Freitas when he began to create positions for, and hire his underqualified friends. From that moment forward, we lost integrity, and we lost any semblance of EEO and diversity. The group of people that he brought in, and those that they have made sure were brought in since, have destroyed EEO and any kind of fair hiring practices and processes. They still go through the motions of making it look like they went through the appropriate steps, but when they stack the committees with people who they know will give them the candidates they want moved forward, there is no such thing as the most qualified person getting the job. Our campus has become cronyistic, nepotistic, and it is filled with bullies who pick on and torment those people who don't have part Hawaiian and/or who they decide they do not accept.

I am Caucasian, and I was one of those people that was bullied for years and years and it really affected my health and sense of well-being. In all cases, I was bullied by people who had worked there less time, were younger than me, and their strategy was always behind the back character assassination. When we hired our new chancellor, Rachel Solemsaas, I was hopeful. I was very excited because, for the first time ever, I was asked to be on a screening/hiring committee for the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs. Less than a week passed and Rachel visited my office. She told me that she was going to take me off that committee because people told her that I was biased against the interim (her obvious choice). I told her that I am sure it must have been the bullies that told her that. She did not want to hear me tell her about the worst problem we had on campus- the bullies. She even hinted at me that if I did not like it, maybe I should leave. She referred me to my supervisor, who was, and continued to be, my biggest bully- Dorinna Cortez. I felt like I was being thrown to a wolf and it was a clear example of "Revictimization of the Victim." I reported several instances of group bullying, and Dorinna did nothing except turn it around and make it seem like it was me, or that I misunderstood. But, I discovered that over time, many people were being bullied. I became an advocate for those people and became a union representative to try to help at that level.

I conducted a bully survey, while the Senate Chair for two years, and our Senate readministered another survey a couple years ago. The results each time showed that we had a serious problem, yet our admin did nothing except continue to support and put the bullies on their various do nothing committees. That's when I realized that our admin was taking advantage of the bullies and using them to keep the rest of us living in fear and to divide us-divide and conquer.

The tenure and promotion process is completely tainted and out of line at Hawaii Community College. There is no confidentiality, there is no integrity, it is all political. I was on a committee that tried to do

the right thing and we unanimously voted to not renew an individual's contract. This was challenged and reversed and that individual is still there. That person's spouse (who also works there) and all of their campus friends (including students and student workers) joined in the bullying. I was never able to recover from any of that and the discussion outside of those supposedly confidential committees has gotten out of hand and the process has certainly been irreparably tainted.

There is a strong component of favoritism taking place on the campus. Dorinna Cortez herself was very strict with my time. I had to write reports annually for the unit that I managed. This is not something that all faculty had to do, it was not in my job description, and those that had to write reports, had help from others in their departments. My unit consisted of me as the only Career and Job Development Counselor. Year after year, after year, I have had to write these reports. Many of them take hundreds of hours to compile the data and write the reports. For me, because I was also serving students, I had to do most of these reports on nights and weekends. All supervisors before Dorinna granted me a couple comp days to allow me to rest after the marathon was over. Dorinna's stance was that it was part of my job, and should therefore not qualify for any kind of comp time. I found my job melded into my private life and that I was having to work at least 75 hours per week. So, that is okay if it consistent across all that she supervises, but she has a clear double standard. She gives overload to several people, and much of it is to attend community/social events outside of work hours. I felt that she was making a concerted effort to make things so uncomfortable for me that I would leave. I did leave, but I do not want to give her that credit, I just have much better things to do with my life than deal with people who are still playing in a sandbox!

The campus enrollments keep plummeting because of lack of applications and enrollment in the college. Part of the answer to this is employment rates have gone up, but it is also because students do not feel welcomed in the Welcome Center, and don't follow through on all the requirements to begin school, and we do not do a good job of trying to retain those students that we have. I also tried to tell our admin that much of our declining enrollment is because of the reputation that we earned in the community. Two different groups of students sued us a few years back, we were on the news, and we were on the front page of the newspaper. Our community is a close knit community and word of mouth has also spread some pretty negative publicity about us. I discovered that we even have a really bad YELP score and comments. People do not forget, and we have really done nothing to improve our reputation.

Our campus is an old campus, but it has slipped into further decline. The newly renovated Hale Aloha has plumbing problems and the third floor cannot even be used. Our admin has failed to remedy this. Rachel and her admin team were convinced that space is an issue, and despite declining enrollments, they purchased 7 portables to make an admin building. This purchase took place more than a year and a half ago and the buildings have just been sitting there. The facilities are cleaned well in some areas and barely cleaned in others. Our maintenance staff is so disenfranchised that many don't do the work and admin has not resolved this.

Our admin has tried to reorganize the college. This has not gained support, yet the admin posted several parts of the reorg on the UH Community Colleges website this past summer. We did not approve it. In addition, Rachel has recently proposed a campus governance reorg. The current governance is structured so that there is equal governance between Faculty Senate, Student Government, and College Council. Rachel is proposing to take those three, give them one rep on her new governance chart and to give admin and Ho'olulu Council the other two positions. She is trying to move our college towards a dictatorship!

Things just slid further down the slope as they crunched and fudged numbers to show the campus they balanced our budget, when we were clearly over \$700,000 short of just being able to meet our reserves as required by our accreditors. Recently, the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs (Dorinna Cortez) asked the Financial Aid Office to disburse the W-2s to regular employees- faculty and staff. They were all in one big envelope and handed out as people came in to pick them up. That means that everyone in the Financial Aid Office was able to see and gossip about how much money I made. This was a violation of everyone's confidentiality and I was horrified and disgusted.

There are so many stories, but suffice to say that I lost confidence in all of our administrators and their ability to lead us. None has any training in college administration or supervision, and they have massive complaints from all unions sitting on their desks. Through all of this mess, our students have suffered; they know and can see when things are not pono.

The campus was so divided, so uncomfortable, and I became disgusted and embarrassed about who we had become. In addition, the bullying didn't stop, so I decided to retire. I did not want to retire yet, but I have now reached the point that even though I will not have the finances I was hoping for when I retired, at least I can leave with integrity and my self-respect. My heart still aches for the place my education started, blossomed, and grew. It is so sad to have to leave, but my health and wellbeing required that I go.

Therefore, because of my long history at the community college, my experiences, and my hope in justice and renewal of our campus for our faculty, staff, and students, I am asking you all to move forward with authorizing this audit of the University of Hawaii at Hawaii Community College. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at: (808) 936-6930, (808) 935-8982, or hschoneb@yahoo.com. Thanks so very much for taking this time to read my statement and to consider our needs.

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Committee on Higher Education

LATE

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