Recent bad news aside, UH is Hawaii's best hope

By David Duffy

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, May 22, 2013

It has been embarrassing for University of Hawaii faculty to watch our UH in the headlines these past several months.

More recently we had the sudden retirement of President M.R.C. Greenwood. All in all, not a good spring.

But it wasn't the headlines that were the really important news. Through all the scandal and controversy, professors and students came and went to classes. Researchers were busy in their labs. Outreach staff found ways to improve the health of children and to keep farmers on the land. Financial officers and other staff took care of the logistics to keep teaching and research going. Last but not least, the craftsmen fought a holding battle against a decaying infrastructure in aging buildings, keeping the lights on and the toilets flushing — small things until they stop working.

And all this work has a payoff: These last two weeks, thousands of UH students have received degrees and are better prepared to make their way in the work force. Their hard work and ingenuity will add billions of dollars to the islands' economy and to supporting the society that helped educate them and will help educate their children. Since last June, faculty have brought in about $153 million in research money and $142 million for more applied projects — all in one of the toughest funding environments in years.

If you think about it, UH has done a pretty good job. It has graduated decades of good people who have helped transform Hawaii from plantations to a modern society. It has distinguished alumni who range across politics and law, science and medicine, the arts, business and sports. Its graduate programs generated our present governor and indirectly a president of the United States.

So why aren't we proud of UH? Where is the feeling of alma mater ("nurturing mother" in Latin) that
reduces alumni from mainland colleges to tears when they sing their college songs? We lack that.

In Hawaii, we are many small groups, each wanting a different part of UH for our own goals, with little or no regard for the whole. Some want cheap tuition and a good education; some want a winning football team; some want an economic engine to drive the state economy; others want a scientific powerhouse. In the middle of the Pacific, UH has to be all things to all of us, so we all have to work together or the parts may not survive on their own.

Gov. John Burns warned that we have a sense of inferiority — thinking outside is better. We hire a lot of administrators from the mainland and many take root, proving to be island-centric, humble hires willing to listen and learn, to serve and to lead, but not to dictate. Too often, however, UH imports administrators who stay for five years, then move on to the next unsuspecting university, crowing of their accomplishments back at UH.

We have to change how we pick administrators. We need to look for administrators who can help our campuses reach for academic excellence while retaining their roots in our communities. We need administrators who can form coalitions across the various interest groups. We need administrators who, above all, will argue for and create quality. We need administrators, backed by students and faculty, willing to argue with the Legislature to their last breath, that the University of Hawaii is our islands' last, best hope.

If we do these things, UH will begin to have a sense of alma mater, of a whole great-er than today's conflicting forces. It won't be fast or flashy, but our children and our children's children will thank us for it.

Someday, if I live long enough, I would hope to hear someone in the Legislature stand up in defense of UH and say, as Daniel Webster long ago declared to the U.S. Supreme Court about his own alma mater, "It is, Sir, as I have said, a small college. And yet there are those who love it!"

Our future and our children deserve no less.
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Bdpapa wrote:

UH is the only hope for higher level education. It is doing a great job. Maintenance of this standard can and will happen. The Reps just got to stop. calling the Administrators for favors. Let them do thier jobs.

on May 22, 2013 | 06:41AM

Nevadan wrote:

How can UH be "doing a great job", when the tuition fee is increasingly out of reach for most students, pray tell ?

on May 22, 2013 | 07:11AM

Bdpapa wrote:

Their research grants are growing strong, they service a large amount of people, They are a...
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http://www.staradvertiser.com/editorialspremium/20130522_Recent_bad_news_aside_UH_is_Hawaiis_best_hope.html?id=208441131&c=n

strong employment base, they offer many areas of studies, and they do a heck of a better job than the Nevada State College System.

on May 22, 2013 | 10:53 AM

Nevadan wrote:
Research grants are initiated by professors, not UH administrators. Obviously you are unfamiliar with university system. Ignorance is bliss.

on May 22, 2013 | 11:36 AM

Bdpapa wrote:
I'm looking at the overall picture. Can't see everything with blinders on!

on May 22, 2013 | 11:56 AM

Nevadan wrote:
Then leave the blinders off. You can't see anything.

on May 22, 2013 | 01:57 PM

Bdpapa wrote:
Wrong again! Been there done that, student and employee!

on May 22, 2013 | 03:29 PM

allie wrote:
I agree with Duffy. I ahve been saying the same thing for the past 3.5 years. I am a proud UH student. UH is the only Carnegie Class I national research university. Please support our academic mission!

on May 22, 2013 | 06:56 AM

tiki886 wrote:
What profession do you expect to pursue after graduation?

on May 25, 2013 | 01:19 PM

Aquarius1 wrote:
Oh, but I am proud of my Alma Mater and it isn't UH Manoa.

on May 22, 2013 | 08:52AM

pcman wrote:
IRT why many local kids go to mainland college. It would behoove UH to publish regularly in comparison with other universities how many degrees it confers each year: Bachelors, Masters, Doctorates, et al, STEM related degrees, research dollars, graduate assistantships, research assistantships, student graduate grants, etc. Then in all the categories, show how many are given to local and out of state students. That may give some idea why many students go to the mainland for college.

on May 22, 2013 | 11:14AM

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on May 22, 2013 | 11:28AM

DRD wrote:
Nice work David! Only if the Star Advertiser would allow more faculty members like you to speak up on behalf of the University, and not constantly focus on the mayhem in the leadership of the University......

on May 22, 2013 | 11:30AM

allie wrote:
agree

on May 22, 2013 | 01:09PM

LL808 wrote:

on May 22, 2013 | 12:09PM

allie wrote:
yikes!

on May 23, 2013 | 07:45AM

2bworker wrote:
This piece applies to all Universities regardless of where they are located. That is the mission and business
model for the University. To hire "top notch" Administrators, they hire "head hunter firms" to do a national search and put a huge salary out there, because "top notch" Administrators "earn" that level of salary/benefits. This is akin to doing national searches for CEO positions or even hiring for a job. It does not necessarily mean you get a "top notch" Administrator. To limit the search to Administrators willing to put down "roots" is an unrealistic expectation, since that assumes that they will do a good enough job to retain that position through thick and thin. When the thin happens, will they want to stay and be a part of the community knowing that the community/people and the State) is their "employer" who wants their head served on a platter? The only time they will stick around is if they can roll into some academic position or they are ready to retire. Otherwise, its onto the next job. When I attend UH, I enjoyed my time there and was not ashamed regardless of the politics being played out.

on May 23, 2013 | 10:02AM