

# Undergraduate Education: External Program Review

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

University of Hawai`i at Manoa

Review Team:

Martha Bradley, University of Utah

Donna B. Hamilton, University of Maryland

Michael Grant, University of Colorado Boulder

## Overview

We begin our report by thanking our hosts at the University of Hawai`i at Manoa for the opportunity to participate in this review, for the thorough and impressive self-studies that provided the foundation for our work, and for the well-organized schedule that allowed us not only to visit once with administrators and program participants, but often two or more times. We appreciate the exceptional graciousness with which the entire review was handled.

We found much in Undergraduate Education to admire, much that is positive and impressive. We learned from you and are taking some of what we learned back to our own universities in order to benefit our own students and colleagues. You have put in place some high impact models that have great ability to effect institutional change, some of which is already occurring. Chief among these is STAR, the degree auditing system that is as important for a student's ability to graduate in four or six years as it is to monitoring instructional capacity and enrollment planning. The enlarged budget for the Honors program and for undergraduate research stand at the top of this list, as do the entire dedicated cohort of administrators and faculty whose task it is to serve undergraduate students. This latter group, with the rare exception, speaks highly of the leadership provided by Vice Chancellor Reed Dasenbrock and of the undergraduate initiatives promoted by him and his office, a sign that good decisions are being made and are appreciated.

These strong positive features sit alongside some characteristics that hinder certain degrees of progress. Overall, administrative structures seem too granular, too flat and distributive, too finely divided—and overall not sufficiently coordinated. For example, in different meetings and talking to people at different levels, we heard “we get no feedback,” “we can't get anything done,” “we don't know how to get the answer to that question.” These comments suggest an administrative system that could benefit from more structure, that is, more defined mechanisms for problem-solving and information flow, along with clearer systems of expectation-setting and accountability. At minimum, every person heading a program should meet individually with his/her supervisor monthly. At this meeting, the program head can ask questions and report on activities, and the supervisor can guide, mentor, and challenge the level

of accomplishment. There should also be monthly group meetings of those who run related programs. These meetings should provide opportunities for joint problem-solving, feedback on new initiatives, brainstorming, reports from subcommittees, and community building. The supervisor should hold annual expectation-setting meetings with each individual and require from each an annual report.

There may also be room here for consolidating programs, for example, there might be a Director that would oversee the Student Success Center, including the Writing Center, Tutoring, and perhaps other units; another Director that would oversee MET and Transfer Advising, another overseeing Study Abroad and Student Exchange. A consolidated segment already in place that meets the spirit of this criterion can be found in the structure of the Honors Program and Undergraduate Research Program.

Improvements to administrative structures will provide better support for goals, especially for the “Do It in 4” campaign. Currently, the campus culture—described to us as a “laissez-faire attitude”—lags behind the high impact programs that have been put in place. More administrative structure can help model the dynamic, energizing, and goal-oriented change that is UHM’s goal for its undergraduate students.

We anticipated UHM would be significantly different from our experiences at mainland public universities. We have some appreciation for the historical contexts and current cultural contexts which make UHM such a distinctive place and many of those unusual strategies undoubtedly enhance university success. It is probably also true that some of them probably hinder university success, at least to some extent. In this regard, three areas that especially stand out for us are the absence of an academic budget that is under the direct control of the Vice Chancellor, the hesitancy to define recruitment goals that would target high achieving students, and the overall under investment in undergraduate education, including insufficient advising staff and inadequate physical facilities. These features sit alongside the stunning achievement of bringing in \$500 million annually in research funding. We understand the value of research dollars—to the prestige of the faculty and the University and indeed to the State of Hawai‘i. The University and the State of Hawai‘i are also obliged to take care of the children of Hawai‘i. The undergraduate programs must be connected to the excellence of the faculty and of the research program. There must be a stable budget process that aligns with the University’s academic goals for students. Currently, the administrative and budgeting structures do not leverage adequately in basic support and enhancement of academic programs.

### **Learning Communities**

UHM’s effort to put student success at the heart of their academic mission is impressive. The review team found the Vice Chancellor’s recent focus on the develop of high impact programs that engage students as they enter as first time students and move them through the system with the “Do it in Four” is particularly promising. The Learning Community programs form key elements vital to the success of this initiative.

It is clear the members of the Undergraduate Education team value and respect the current Director of ACE. Her enthusiasm and devotion to students is particularly evident as is her personal engagement in the student success initiative. The one-hour ACE course, the center of what UHM describes as a learning community, is largely her design and reflects her best understanding of what an undergraduate student needs to know to successfully navigate the UHM system.

The second component of the UHM learning community is a “cluster” of three General Education courses that are not currently integrated. Sometimes these courses exhibit a central theme, although sometimes they do not. The “community” that occurs in the LC is largely the result of the one-hour course and because of informal groups like study groups that are organized by students who are in common courses in the cluster. This basic structure could be strengthened by forming intentional connections between the classes in the cluster and thus provide a shared intellectual learning experience for the students.

Building the connection between a strengthened UHM LC and the “Do it in Four” campaign is also particularly important. As the University moves to pre-registration of the entire first year class, it might build LC’s for all first year students that combine a one-hour successful navigation class (or CAS 110), a common three-hour General Education course, and a cluster of General Education courses centered on a theme. National research suggests a first year experience based on powerful high impact practices like these—learning communities and an integrated path through General Education—will have positive effects on both retention and graduation rates. UHM has all the basic elements in place, and can intentionally redesign the plan and approach for greater impact. UHM does not need to start from scratch but just build on existing strengths.

Although survey data gives valuable feedback that is useful in adjusting course content in the one-hour ACE experience, a more holistic assessment of the “LC” as it is presently configured will be essential to restructuring the design to more directly embed the first year learning community in the academic component of the student success plan—pre-registration—powerful first year experience—do it in four.

Although once a popular and broadly represented approach, the Freshman Seminars program should be reevaluated and serious consideration given to discontinuing the program and allocating the resources elsewhere. National research suggests that the learning communities approach yields significant results in terms of retention and graduation rates. The UHM model could be greatly strengthened through a strengthened core that fosters critical thinking, writing, and reading skills during the first year in addition to the learning achieved in ACE. The ACE course results in knowledge essential to a student’s successful navigation of the university as a system. An ACE General Education core could help build core competencies essential to the broad and deep learning the student needs to engage in as an undergraduate for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

### **Advising**

We strongly applaud the recent advising and policy innovations and initiatives which have taken place in multiple ways, including STAR, Manoa Advising Center, the Campus Academic Council, the policy of

mandatory advising for everyone for two years, the policy to declare a major by junior year, and the “Do It in Four” messaging.

That being said, every day, and everywhere, and from everyone we heard that UHM does not have enough advising staff. There are not enough advisors in the Manoa Advising Center, for the transfer students, and in the Honors Program. We were told there were four advisors in MAC for 4500 students, and one advisor for 1800 transfer students. Group sessions, email advising, and websites can cover some of the need. Many students, however, need to talk face to face. Twenty minutes with an advisor can be a game-changer for students and for UHM, especially as the campaign to “Do It In Four” heats up. Lack of advising holds up choosing a major, and so holds up making a four-year plan. We also point out that nationally, there is a strong emphasis on ‘targeted’ advising where students get early warnings and context for their academic decisions using software tools. For example, students who are getting C level grades (usually quite acceptable academically) in their major have graduation rates less than half those with A and B level grades. The sooner students receive this type of information, the sooner they are able to make ‘corrective’ changes such as more effort and success, change to a more suitable major, and have high probability of graduation success.

UHM may also wish to consider a campus-wide centralization of supervision, oversight, staff assignments, along with a centralized physical location where students all know is ‘the’ place to at least start their advising. A beginning to this idea already exists in the website address for STAR that begins [www.star.hawaii.edu](http://www.star.hawaii.edu), a slogan that appears on water bottles and other paraphernalia distributed to advertise STAR. Students need similarly strong direction when it comes to finding out where to get questions answered. We were informed that an individual student might have five or more advising connections, each with their special perspective. For brand new 18 year-old college students, the UHM advising structure appears both too thin and too complex. If a student has a problem or complaint, the pathway to a decision-maker who can resolve the problem would ideally be very clear to that student.

Current information from higher education in general indicates that effective, early response advising can significantly improve graduation rates. UHM has taken excellent steps in the right direction. We urge you to continue this work, addressing advising shortfalls and organizational structure.

### **Honors Program**

The Honors Program is making important progress in every direction. The program has the clearly defined mission to provide “a unique, challenging, and research-based undergraduate education” for the University’s “most talented and motivated students.” A strong recruitment program and growing reputation on campus is leading to increases in enrollment at both the lower and upper divisions. The emphasis on research tailored to individual students, faculty mentoring, and strong advising has put this program on solid footing.

The chief enabler for this program has been the increase in the budget, allowing most significantly for the program’s ability to buy out faculty for the program and thus to allow faculty an opportunity to teach new courses and test out new ideas. Addition of faculty fosters a stronger academic community

around Honors, among faculty, and within the undergraduate student body. The Honors Council is especially excited about the future of Honors, referencing the strong pool of nominated faculty from which the next faculty group will be chosen. As this system becomes more institutionalized, Honors curriculum will gain more consistency. Admittedly the increased interest among faculty poses challenges for departments needing to meet their own instructional needs, but departments have also gained. The academically enriched Honors context provides them new incentives to recruit students to their majors and to add Honors tracks.

Honors students praise the advising in the program, along with the four-year planning provided, and indicated that the Director and an advisor handle this responsibility. We were pleased that the Director shares this responsibility. A successful Honors Program requires a very hands-on leader. Still, the program as it grows will need an additional advisor probably by next year.

Among others matters to be dealt with is the issue of recruitment to the University. So far the Honors Program has not been particularly active in recruitment to UHM, suggesting some remaining ambivalence about the place that Honors is to hold here. It seemed to us that there exists some unease about recruiting the “most talented and motivated students” within a context of promoting the University’s commitment to being inclusive. This issue needs to be confronted directly and a system worked out. Faculty and administrators need to develop a plan for recruitment and for messaging that supports both of these goals. Further, recruitment to the Honors Program must be led by the Director and the faculty, not exclusively but certainly with frequency. It is to the credit of UHM that the Director of the Honors Program has had a distinguished career in research and publication. Putting the Director out in front at Honors recruitment sessions assures parents and their talented and motivated students that UHM indeed has the programming and resources to provide a high quality undergraduate experience.

The enhancements in the Honors Program bode well for UHM. Strong and regular mentorship of the Director is advised so that UHM can maximize the opportunity it has created. Training the Director in administrative functions (e.g. how to process payment of travel for guest speakers), supervision of staff, enrollment management processes and many other university functions are needed to clarify expectation and provide the additional support for unfaltering realization of goals.

The strengthened Honors Program has energized faculty and students and is serving to leverage academic standards and graduation rates—a great example of budget allocation aligning with academic goals. A next step in this process should be improving Honors College facilities. The Honors Program needs to be moved to an air conditioned space with private offices for the Director and advisor/s, separate rooms for students to meet, a student lounge, and furniture for other staff that sets a professional, modern, and welcoming tone.

## **Undergraduate Research**

UHM is to be highly complimented for the funds provided for student research, and for the commitment to doubling the funds to \$500,000 in academic year 2012-13. These funds make visible to students that strong academic work is highly valued at UHM. Likewise, the 3.5 GPA required to access these funds motivates high achievement. The administration of this program from within Honors but available to all students gives Honors more stature even as it signals the inclination toward inclusivity. Strong management led by the Director of Honors working in conjunction with a Faculty Advisory Board is needed to manage expectations of faculty and students and maintain transparency. Strong connection to departments and majors will cultivate department buy-in and strengthen academic programs.

## **Assessment**

We were impressed with the Assessment operation at UHM. We were impressed with the two assessment experts we met and their emphasis on conducting meaningful evaluation on an ongoing basis. The requirement that all programs must report each year is important for establishing an assessment infrastructure and clarifying expectations. The “homegrown” software provides helpful transparency to the assessment process for those who wish to use this system. The emphasis on assessment for program improvement is right on target.

## **Service Learning**

The review team was impressed by how uniquely UHM’s strategic vision is situated in a particular sense of place, connected to the natural environment, with high value placed on a diversity of persons and cultures. The Service Learning program bolsters these elements in the strategic vision for UHM. Service Learning as a pedagogy fosters deep learning about the human condition, our obligation to the earth and each other, and to self-knowledge.

Particularly impressive is the Service Learning program’s regional focus. Rather than thinking narrowly about community, the SL program intentionally builds connections, establishes community partners, and develops opportunities for civic engagement. It does this work with a small staff made up of the Director, a second staff person funded by a grant, graduate assistants, and work study students. Special commendation should be made to the work of the entrepreneurial director who has successfully generated new revenue through private foundations and federal grant programs. Regardless of this impressive record, the institution and its leaders should publicly acknowledge and reinforce the way SL helps it accomplish its mission. The location of the Peace Corp and AmeriCorps offices in the SL program is a strong strategy for sharing resources, and maximizing opportunities for students. An impressive number of faculty members teach service learning classes—20% of UHM’s full-time faculty.

## **Interdisciplinary Studies**

The Interdisciplinary Studies Program plays a special role in the undergraduate curriculum of the University of Hawaii Manoa. It serves the needs of students that have interests in issues or areas of study that span disciplinary boundaries. Functionally, it sometimes serves as an incubator where new

thematic, interdisciplinary programs grow to the point that they can become majors located in an academic college on campus.

The IS self-study, surveys, and discussion with IS students suggest that a particular type of student is attracted to the major. These are students who have a specific passion or interest that doesn't fit conveniently in any of the available majors on campus. One alumnus of the program commented that "the quality of education offered in the Interdisciplinary Studies program is largely what the student makes of it." When it works well, IS inspires intellectual independence, self-motivation and awareness of the connections between the content of different disciplines. When it does not, particularly when the advising system breaks down, students experience significant frustration and a feeling of lack of support.

The IS program is particularly dependent on intense, individualized advising. Currently there are two full-time tenured faculty members (one faculty specialist and one instructional faculty member) who spend half of their time advising, another quarter of their time teaching and the rest of the time serving on university committees or doing their own scholarship. Despite the challenge of doing the amount of advising required to guide students through the major, the IS program graduates an impressive number of graduates—124 during 2010-11, the second highest number of graduates next to the Psychology department.

The IS leadership should be commended for the new curriculum it has developed in interdisciplinary methodology and theory. These courses and others like them could form the core of the IS major, moving toward the objective of a four year plan and learning outcomes assessment. The future impact of these courses and their potential for building greater integration into the major is limited by the lack of resources for faculty support. Under the present model, the two faculty members advise 200 students, graduate more than one hundred and twenty students each year, and design and teach methods and theory classes. If IS was able to "buyout" faculty, in the same way that Honors does, they could require two methods and theory courses as the core of the IS major creating greater consistency in learning outcomes. Another approach would be to establish a rotating group of IS faculty—perhaps the IS Faculty Fellows—who would teach methods and theory classes each semester for a two year time period, sharing the responsibility for teaching methods and theory classes, embedding integrative thinking courses in the curriculum of both the IS major and the academic disciplines. This would demonstrate the institutional value placed on interdisciplinary activity in undergraduate curriculum and the value placed on cross-disciplinary teaching.

*Interdisciplinarity should be a core element of a 21<sup>st</sup> century undergraduate education, equipping students with the intellectual skills they will need to engage in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. This program is a distinctive strength of Undergraduate Education at UHM that has the potential to become even stronger if given some attention. Priorities should be the development of a core IS educational experience, the advancement of a four-year plan, the integration of other UE initiatives such as learning communities or study abroad to build on existing institutional strengths and establish strong connections. Ironically, the Interdisciplinary Studies program is academically about creating and understanding connections, but it exists and functions institutionally on the periphery and separate from the institutional mission focusing on student success.*

Program surveys conducted in 2002-2003 suggest significant levels of student satisfaction with advising, overall experience, curriculum quality, and level of engagement in interdisciplinary activity. Surveys conducted by the institution and by Environmental Studies suggest a slightly different story. Current students and alumni of the program challenged the value of IS advising, pointing to the difficulty of making informed decisions about curriculum for their IS plan at the beginning of the major, making needed changes to the plan as the work progresses or course offerings change, and the irregular quality of advising sessions. One student said: "sometimes we may run into some conflicts or change of plans that could alter our original proposal plan. The advisers could be more flexible and understanding of our decision." If a class is not offered or offered at a convenient plan, the process of changing the plan was described as complicated and unnecessarily inflexible. Importantly, the perception was that it impeded the process towards completion of the degree. Some students valued the learning they experienced from writing the proposals, others expressed frustration with the process of writing and rewriting the proposal, and getting final approval of the proposal and plan. Several students attributed the inconsistent quality of advising, the slow response to emails, phone calls or attempts to schedule advising appointments to the lack of sufficient staff.

An alarming complaint that surfaced in every type of available assessment data was about the unprofessional, "condescending and impatient," "harassment" of students by one of the advisors. This situation negatively impacted the experience of several IS students pursuing Environment Studies as an area of study; a significant number of respondents to the University's Program Review Survey conducted in 2011 made the same point. The review team believed that this message was consistent and significant enough to warrant an institutional response. Because the IS program is essentially two faculty members, there exists great vulnerability when advising or teaching is failing to work in an optimum manner. One structural response to this would be the creation of a faculty council that could share responsibility for teaching and advising, supporting and augmenting that accomplished by the core faculty.

In conclusion, the Interdisciplinary Studies program has existing strengths, but also important challenges in terms of viability, advising, staffing, and communicating its requirements and approach. IS would be greatly served by the addition of at least a half-time position for staff support, resources for faculty support for methods and theory classes, and the infusion of new faculty into the IS institutional structure to contribute to both teaching and advising for IS students.

### **Study Abroad**

The study abroad staff is, like almost all of the professional UHM staff we met, very dedicated to their students and their students' success. They operate from poor physical facilities and have, at best, modest levels of staffing. If UHM has expansion of study abroad (in the broadest sense of the term, e.g. to include exchange students) as a major strategic goal, then the campus will need to make some significant additional resource investments in the program. If the current levels of student participation are deemed satisfactory, the program operates effectively with an unusually high level of academic connection to the UHM faculty. This integrated strategy undoubtedly enhances student experience and faculty development; it may also restrict opportunities to those represented by UHM faculty as it



appears to discourage recruitment of faculty from other institutions who might represent disciplines or sub-specialties not found in the UHM faculty.

The operational/administrative staffing falls well below typical university levels so that more senior ranks end up regularly engaged in duties which don't fit their advanced training and skill levels. We also think the strategy of depending on volunteer faculty proposals from which particular Study Abroad programs are chosen might be strengthened with longer-range, more stable, strategic planning of the curriculum menu. The current strategy appears to be a bit haphazard.

From the student perspective, the largest barrier appears to be the high cost. Adequate loans and grants are available but they usually result in a major debt load for students. There was also concern that it actually slowed graduation times for students to do Study Abroad; it should not and need not do that.

We note that the response to the recommendations in the last review of Study Abroad apparently stimulated little or no changes despite a nearly doubling of enrollment levels in the program.

## **ROTC**

We found the current ROTC programs—Army and Air Force—are well run, well-led by dedicated officers and they have demonstrated major success in providing officers from typically under-represented cultures and populations in the military services. We found the absence of Navy/Marine ROTC programs puzzling, given the historical significance of Hawaii to the U.S. Navy. We were not able to identify a clear explanation of why they were not represented. The physical facilities for the Army ROTC program are pretty good, although their distance from the central part of the campus accentuates their status as an 'add on' to the main thrust and mission of the university. On the other hand, the Air Force physical facilities are decidedly sub-standard. The toilets, for example, do not have running hot and cold water and they should really be seen as an embarrassment to the UHM campus. The academic classrooms for Air Force are quite poor on at least two grounds: (1) insufficient size for enrollments and may exceed fire safety standards and (2) acoustic conditions are very poor, especially when the 'window' air conditioners are operating.

Within the ROTC units, the students relayed several complaints: (1) parking is inadequate, especially for those from the satellite campuses, (2) instructor quality appears to be somewhat variable, (3) the time demands and expectations often significantly exceed what is published in the catalog (triple the time vs regular academics was mentioned by several), (4) safety in the parking lots which have no lights. While we recognize that physical space on the campus coupled to the major costs of new buildings limits the likelihood of Air Force ROTC being provided better quarters, there are several things the campus could do to improve the students' situation. Change the rule that charges them \$5.00 to drive into their parking which the satellite students need to do two or three times every week. Provide a mechanism where they could purchase an annual parking pass, improve the campus maintenance around the buildings (weeds were waist high in some areas), build a transfer table which matches community college courses with UHM courses (where they do match) so that students have a clearer understanding of what will and will not transfer. This problem seemed to be especially acute for the ROTC students.

Student computer labs could be significantly enhanced in the ROTC spaces which now depend on outside donors to fund those facilities. Tech support was reported as marginal.

Several students strongly commended the advising and personal attention received from ROTC officers that they said was significantly better, more personal and more helpful than their main campus advising options.

### **Conclusion**

We applaud the many strengths of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, including the high impact and positive leadership of Reed Dasenbrock. We also conclude that Undergraduate Education is significantly underfunded and has significantly deficient physical space both in quantity and in quality. We offer the following recommendations with an interest in helping UHM accomplish its mission and reach its goals.

1. Strengthen administrative structures. Develop more defined and regular systems of communication, reporting, and accountability, with an eye to improving operations that support goals.
2. On an annual basis, define and publicize within the University (to deans, department chairs, faculty, advisers) the undergraduate recruiting, retention, and graduation rate achievements and goals, with reports on all units (colleges, departments, programs, advising units) distributed widely. Identify strengths and weaknesses and set new goals. Make clear the recruitment goal for the Honors program.
3. Make adequate advising a priority across all student cohorts.
4. Improve academic control of decision-making. Adjust administrative and budgeting structures to direct increased funding to undergraduate education. These changes should affect and include the Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, and Deans, as well as academic budgets, academic facilities, and fundraising for academic programs.
5. Improve the facilities occupied by undergraduate students and programs. The design and quality of physical space communicates what the University values; characteristics of physical space model and motivate the behavior of those who use the space—students, faculty, and staff.
6. Organize space so that programs with related missions can more easily collaborate, share support staff, and make efficient use of supplies and equipment.
7. Minimize current practices where understaffed units employ highly trained individuals (e.g., S faculty) to devote substantial work time to routine staff/student functions such as distributing leaflets, scheduling appointments, and answering telephone calls.