

**INVESTIGATING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR  
PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
HAWAI'I**

**SUPPORTED BY THE LUMINA FOUNDATION – EQUITY  
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**UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I®**

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Do not put success only on students. There is a sense of injustice expecting young people to change when the system isn't willing to change with them... When the value of the student (i.e. their ability to complete a degree) is placed above the student's values, the institution becomes highly problematic.”* Vidalino Raatior (COE, UHM)

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports one of the most diverse student communities in the United States through its ten campuses, including Pacific Islander students of diverse heritage. Despite awareness of the issues surrounding educational equity for Pacific Islander students, these students remain significantly underserved and under-supported with the UH system.<sup>1</sup> While efforts are underway to address equity issues associated with UH's Native Hawaiian students, there remains a need for a state-wide focus on support for our non-Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander students.

There are three interrelated but different Pacific Islander student communities served by UH. First, resident non-Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders who are US citizens and residents of Hawai'i or other US states. Second, US citizen Pacific Islanders from US territories in American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands. Finally, non-American citizens from former US trust territories, Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia who are not US citizens but have rights to live, study, and work in the United States through Compact of Free Association Agreements (COFA).<sup>2</sup> The number of students from each group has grown rapidly over the two previous decades and is projected to continue to grow in the coming decade. Students typically referred to as Micronesian are the fastest-growing student population in the state.

The challenge of meeting the educational needs of this community in Hawai'i was initially documented two decades ago.<sup>3</sup> The dynamic character of the social demographics of Pacific Islander communities suggests that UH will see the challenges of meeting educational equity needs for this community grow in the coming years.<sup>4</sup>

For most Pacific Islander students, programs developed to help historically underrepresented minority groups have not provided the necessary support. Moreover, the diversity of this student community

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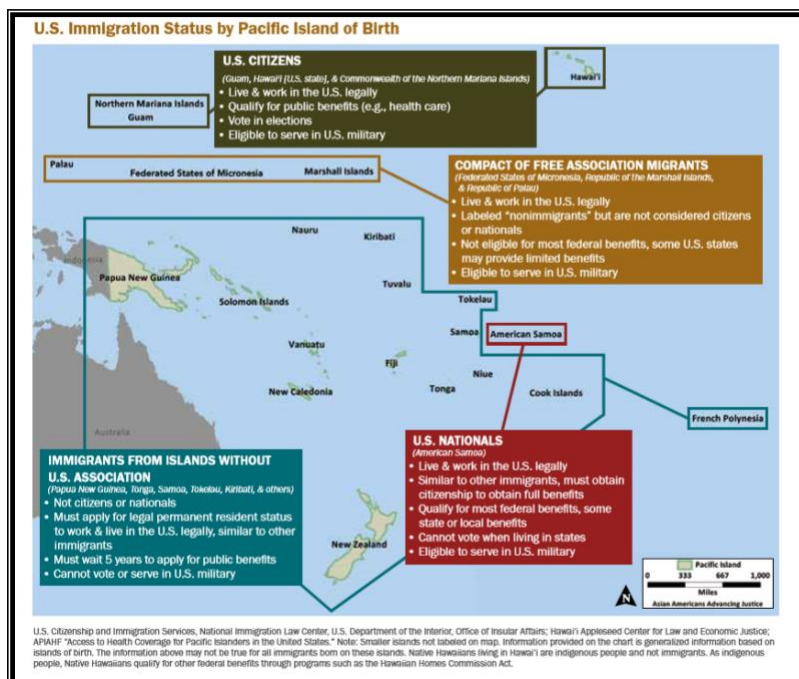
<sup>1</sup> The term Pacific Island students includes students from US territories in American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, and students from the former US trust territories Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia who are not US citizens but have rights to live, study, and work in the United States through Compact of Free Association Agreements (COFA). For a highly detailed contextual discussion, see Morris, K., 2018. Navigating the Compact of Free Association: Three Decades of Supervised Self-Governance. *U. Haw. L. Rev.*, 41, p.384.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, K., 2018. Navigating the Compact of Free Association: Three Decades of Supervised Self-Governance. *U. Haw. L. Rev.*, 41, p.384. See also, Sinclair, Gwen. "Research Guides: Micronesians in Hawai'i: Social Issues." (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Heine, Hilda C. "Culturally Responsive Schools for Micronesian Immigrant Students. PREL Briefing Paper." (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Recent articles are among the best means of tracking these rapidly shifting dynamics in advance of the US 2020 Census. See, for instance: <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/post/next-generation-micronesians-hawai-i-reclaim-narrative#stream/0>; <https://www.civilbeat.org/2018/05/how-hawaii-schools-are-building-bridges-to-micronesian-students/>; <https://www.civilbeat.org/2018/05/hawaii-inequality-study-overlooked-thousands-of-micronesians/>; <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2019/05/15/new-census-numbers-show-increase-cofa-migrants-hawaii/>; <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/12/hawaii-micronesia-migration-homeless-climate-change/>.

further highlights the challenges of developing structural supports. **The work completed under the Equity Leadership Acceleration grant demonstrates that there is a critical opportunity to enhance existing programs and develop new supports to create long-term educational equity for Pacific Islander students.** Advancing equity-minded leadership, defined as the recognition among state leaders as the need to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes and increase postsecondary attainment for Pacific Islander students, will require a sea-change in how high-level state policy makers, including UH administrators, understand the needs of Pacific Islander students. In order to reach state equity goals and improve minority student outcomes for some of the state’s most vulnerable populations, there remains work to be done.



**Figure 1 Pacific Island Communities**  
Source: "A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States 2014." Los Angeles, CA (2014), p. 21. Available:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rgFdm0QdoenIU3rVYMLCgxoKm8biwvfU/view?pli=1>

## BACKGROUND

In Fall 2019, UH was awarded an Equity Leadership Acceleration (ELA) Grant from the Lumina Fund for Policy Acceleration, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Inc. Proposed actions under the ELA grant were to increase awareness, commitment, and the capacity needed for equity-minded leadership at the state level. The ELA grant was undertaken as an opportunity for self-assessment. Specifically, it was designed to identify and document the status of UH’s equity efforts toward Pacific Islander students and to determine areas for improvement so that UH could meaningfully enhance existing programs or establish new supports designed to improve student experiences and outcomes across the UH system.

Improving equity for Pacific Islander students is a priority for Hawai’i because the state remains challenged to meet educational equity goals, including issues of access and achievement for Pacific Island students. Pacific Islanders comprise 2% of UH enrollment but about 4% of Hawai’i’s population.

An important observer of Pacific Islander demographics in education over the last decades, APIA Scholars, documented a worrisome pattern. Between 2012 and 2017, the overall percentage of Pacific Islander

students enrolling in higher education dropped in both the continental United States and in the State of Hawai'i. Moreover, the overall percent decline *was greater in the state of Hawai'i (-39.4%) than on the US continent (-11.6%)*. These numbers beg a series of questions: Are we seeing educational outsourcing or flight? When the overall size of the PI student community is growing faster than the national total population, why is their percentage in higher education declining? In the UH system, given its particular commitments and sense of responsibility for indigenous and regional educational outcomes, how should we understand these shifting enrollments?

Figure 3: Educational Attainment for NHPI Sub-Groups Compared to the National Average



Source: American Community Survey, 3-Year Estimates.

Figure 2 "Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education." Apia Scholars 2018.

Pacific Islander share of total degrees awarded is closer to 1%. Census data shows that for the years 2013-17, only 17% of Pacific Islanders have an associate degree or higher as compared to 44% for the total population. Completion rates for Pacific Islanders are also considerably lower than other groups. By comparison with other historically marginalized and underserved student communities, Pacific Islanders have the greatest educational equity needs and the lowest rates of access though they are a relatively smaller group in terms of population size.

Retention and graduation rates over 4, 5, and 6+ years for non-Hawaiian Pacific Islander students reflect the concerns in educational equity that must be addressed. For UH Community Colleges, the 2-year graduation rate for first-time full time freshman did not exceed 4% and never went about 12% for a four year rate. For UH Mānoa, the 4-year graduation rate never exceeded 20% over the last 15 years. Appendix A provides tables for all campus graduation rates.

Similarly, retention rates for Pacific Islander students significantly lag behind student retention rates for all students. At UH Community Colleges, one-year retention for first-time full-time freshman stood at 50% in 2018, the last year for which there was data. UH Mānoa's retention rate was 66% for PI students compared to the overall retention rate of 83% for all students. For the full data on UH System retention rates please see Appendix B.

Undergraduate enrollment for Fall 2015-2019 by Pacific Islander subgroup for UH 4-year campuses are shown in Figure 3 and for UH 2-year campuses are in Figures 4.

Work on the ELA grant was contextualized by prior efforts at UH Mānoa (UHM) and the UH System to address the equity needs of this particular student community. The 1994 *O Le Sulufa'iga: Report of the University of Hawai'i Task Force on Samoans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education* (1994) was the



culmination of a systematic self-study by the University at that time. That report focused on Samoan students and their community but also presented findings relevant to other Pacific Islanders (excluding Native Hawaiians). The *O Le Sulufa'iga* report documented a striking need for support for Samoan and other Pacific Islander students and offered a number of recommendations for paths forward, some of which will be echoed in the recommendations of this report.

**Undergraduate, Resident Student Enrollment, University of Hawai'i, 4-Year Institutions**

	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019
Guamanian or Chamorro	11	14	12	13	13
Micronesian (not GC)	28	27	27	33	28
Other Pacific Islander	34	47	44	39	45
Samoan	290	301	338	353	336
Tongan	39	47	64	80	64
Mixed Pacific Islander	29	24	28	28	30
Mixed Race (2 or more)	115	109	118	121	117
Guamanian or Chamorro	87	99	102	105	105
Micronesian (not GC)	20	22	26	19	20
Other Pacific Islander	13	13	13	14	13
Samoan	64	66	63	55	61
Tongan	28	27	17	18	15
Grand Total	468	495	514	525	511

Figure 3: Statistics from *Pacific Islander Enrollment Data Spreadsheet*, University of Hawai'i (2015-2019).



**Undergraduate, Resident Student Enrollment, University of Hawai'i Community Colleges**

	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019
Guamanian or Chamorro	39	36	30	20	14
Micronesian (not GC)	98	88	130	158	151
Other Pacific Islander	59	47	48	34	35
Samoan	168	163	151	134	116
Tongan	57	59	55	51	36
Mixed Pacific Islander	107	138	159	161	181
Mixed Race (2 or more)	642	659	667	634	623
Guamanian or Chamorro	93	117	99	91	91
Micronesian (not GC)	55	66	66	59	64
Other Pacific Islander	232	241	250	241	243
Samoan	235	200	206	198	181
Tongan	27	35	46	45	44
Grand Total	1170	1190	1240	1192	1156

Figure 4: Statistics from *Pacific Islander Enrollment Data Spreadsheet*, University of Hawai'i (2015-2019).

A second context for the work described here is the July 15, 2019 convening by the Office of the Provost, Institute of Sustainability and Resilience (ISR), and the Center for Pacific Island Studies (CPIS) for faculty, staff, and researchers who work and/or conduct research on or about Pacific Island nations. With presentations from across UHM and UH System units, it was clear that UH's footprint in the Pacific Islands is significant yet under-coordinated. Among the findings and recommendations was the observation that numerous opportunities to increase student involvement in the region were not being taken.



## ELA PROJECT WORK

With an extramural award of \$50,000, during the six-month project period of the grant, the grant team, including two graduate research assistants undertook a series of actions to develop awareness of the current state of educational equity for Pacific Islander students within the UH system.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the scope of work focused on:

- Identifying prior reports relevant to understanding the status of educational equity for Pacific Islander students (including at UH, HI-DOE, the State of Hawai'i, and US national contexts);
- Identifying and seeking to understand linkages between stakeholders in educational equity for Pacific Islander students;
- Conducting broad, qualitative interviews with current Pacific Islander students from across PI student demographics at UHM, UHH, UHWO, KCC, and other UH system schools;
- Conducting focus groups with current PI students;
- Interviewing UH administrators and faculty at system, college, and department levels about their current understanding of the status of equity, challenges, and opportunities for advancing equity for this student community (or these student communities);
- Convening a high-level statewide workshop with representatives from the HI legislature, HI-DOE, UH System, the upper administration of the UH colleges and universities, and leadership from a number of community organizations active in this space;
- Convening a workshop with current UH faculty who of Oceanian heritage about their perceptions of the current status and challenges facing educational equity for Pacific Islander Students.

The following sections report on the actions undertaken under this ELA project, document key findings, and propose a series of recommendations.

### I. Student Experiences of Educational Equity

*“As a Pacific Islander, it would be nice if there was a space for Pacific Islanders where they can come together... It would be cool to see other Pacific Islanders not only from Micronesia but from Polynesia and Melanesia be in a safe space where they can share their frustrations and challenges while being here at UH.”*

Over the course of the grant period, the ELA project developed and ran a series of individual interviews and focus groups with representation from across the Pacific Islander student communities. These interviews were organized around identifying students' experiences as well as the challenges and opportunities they face.

Under the direction of Dr. Tauasosi (PSSS, UHM), graduate researcher Chrissy Samalaulu developed a protocol for and conducted in-depth, culturally-sensitive qualitative interviews with individual students

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<sup>5</sup> While the Lumina Grant ELA award was proposed for 6 months, due to the timing of the arrival of funding and unanticipated challenges in fiscal administration of funds once they arrived, the grant team only had a little over three and one-half months to complete the primary research goals under this grant. Two graduate research assistants with existing community ties and relationships were hired to undertake primary data collection. Virtually the entirety of the ELA grant funding was used to support their work and to convene the workshops, focus groups, and student interview sessions. Our work broadly engaged across the UH system, but there was a focus on UH Manoa in the student, faculty, and administrative interviews as the largest campus in the system.



about their specific individual experiences to identify areas in which UH and HI state resources could be deployed to enhance equity goals. Figure 5 identifies the ethnicity of the students interviewed for the project.

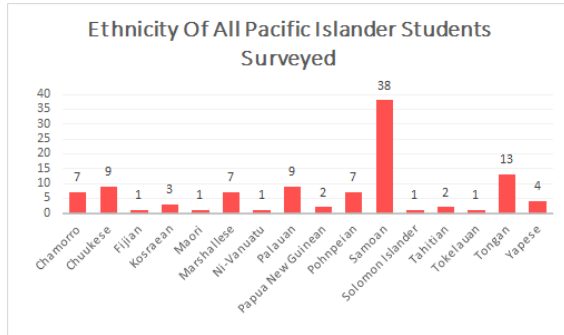


Figure 5 Ethnicity of Students Surveyed

The students surveyed were primarily undergraduates, but included graduate students as depicted in Figure 6 with students coming from high schools both in Hawaii and throughout the Pacific Islands as indicated in Figure 7.

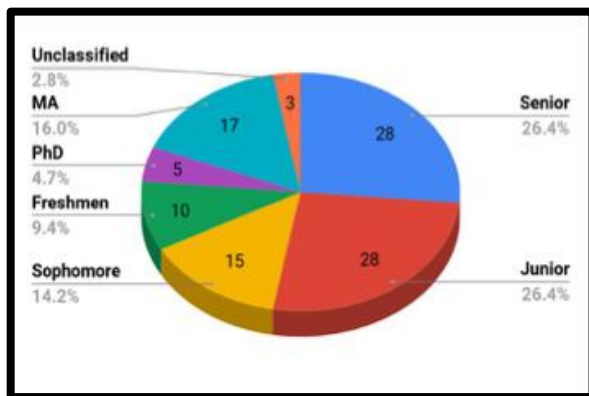


Figure 6: Class Standing

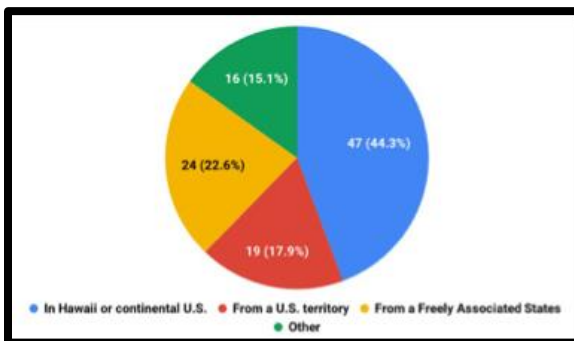


Figure 7: High School Attended

As Dr. Tausosi identified early in the project, prior work in various UH and UHM offices including SEED, PPPS, CPIS and others meant that we entered into this student focus with a strong sense of likely responses. Prior scholarly work has also shed significant light on student perceptions and experiences of

educational equity at UH and across US educational contexts.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, survey results found that many students did not feel prepared, perhaps attributing to the low retention rates.

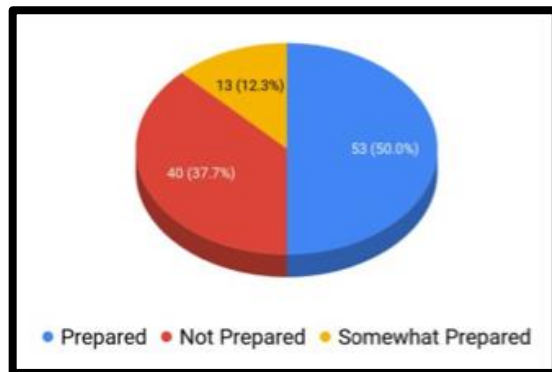


Figure 8: Perception of Academic Preparedness

Key insights which both reflect and extend prior scholarship, and which cut across student responses, included:

- *A perceived need for more Pasifika/Tangata Moana/Oceanian/Pacific Islander student specific services.*
- *A desire for additional aid in adjusting to college life and post-college life.*
- *The benefit of diversity in leadership positions bearing on PI student educational success: "If Pacific Islanders see other Pacific Islanders in leadership positions at the University, they will succeed!"*
- *The need for further training and professional/pedagogical development among UH faculty and staff towards understanding and increased sensitivity to PI students' culturally grounded expectations and norms around education: "I feel the instructors could validate/value the feedback of Pacific Islander students so they don't feel discriminated against."*
- *The perceived need to decolonize higher education as an institutional bureaucracy. "Be more student-focused instead of being too bureaucratic in their endeavors; ultimately, it's about empowering and inspiring the students to be better as people and students in life, not just the grades and resumes."*
- *Persistent challenges in navigating the financial aid process were regularly identified as a significant obstacle. "Please try to help Pacific Island students actually complete their FAFSA instead of having them come to the office five different times for different requirements. Some come from immigrant families and do not always have a way to show proof of income, social security, etc. Try to help them out by going above and beyond to help them get the sources. Pacific Islanders are struggling in general being here in the US."*
- *Opportunities to increase the number and kinds of community specific scholarships and aid programs. "It would be great to have more financial support, especially for those from Oceania. Many times we're the first in our families to attend college and are trying to navigate academia on our own."*

<sup>6</sup> Bonus, Rick. *The Ocean in the School: Pacific Islander Students Transforming Their University*. Duke University Press, 2020; BrckaLorenz, Allison, N. Saelua, and J. Kinzie. "Indigenous and Pacific Islander students and faculty in higher education." AAC&U Diversity, Learning, & Student Success Conference, 2017; Kerr, R. Andrew. *Identifying Factors for Student Success in Micronesian Populations*. PhD diss., Creighton University, 2017; Raatiar, Vidalino. *Successful Practices of Micronesian College Students in Hawai'i: Utilizing Positive Deviants to Develop Strength-Based Student Support Services in Higher Education*. PhD diss., University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2017.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, students are aware of both the opportunities and challenges of navigating UH towards degree completion. The result, for many students, is a painful contrast between pride and joy in their accomplishments and a feeling that their particular community is not sufficiently respected or materially supported. In reviewing the interviews, this sentiment was starkly expressed by one student who demanded that faculty and administrators “Stop teaching and start listening!”

## II. UH Administration and Faculty Perceptions and Stances towards PI Student Educational Equity

To identify and assess the status of UH, HI DOE administration and high-level state policy makers’ familiarity with and support of the needs of each of these student groups, the team developed and administered a survey for UH administrators and faculty about how they are (or are not) familiar or engaged with supporting educational outcomes for this student community. Under the direction of Dr. Mawyer (CPIS, UHM), graduate researcher Alana Kanahale (Geography, UHM) developed a protocol for and conducted open-ended interviews with individual administrators, faculty and staff across the UH system and several partners including the EWC. We understand the perspectives of these key institutional actors as critical to identifying areas in which UH and HI state resources could be deployed to enhance equity goals.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 9: Wordle of faculty most used words

Questions included:

- Does the administrative office/unit collaborate with PI states, territories, communities?
- Is your unit conducting research, administering active grants, or supporting initiatives in the region?
- Does the administrative office/unit engage with the region and/or with Hawai'i in the region?

<sup>7</sup> Uehara, Denise L., Jonathan Chugen, and Vidalino Staley Raatior. "Perceptions of Pacific Islander students in higher education." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 11, no. 2 (2018): 182.



- Does the administrative office/unit track/engage/support PI/COFA students in any way?
- Do the needs of this student community come into view in your unit?
- How do PI/COFA students appear/not appear in the administrative office/unit's equity efforts?
- Are you assessing the success/challenges of this/these student communities?
- For academic programs, how do Oceania/PI contexts appear in the unit's curriculum/pedagogy
- How are PI/COFA students subject-content knowledge needs met?

A number of key conclusions were identified. First, the energy and passion expressed by staff, faculty, and administration for addressing issues associated with Pacific Islander success was pronounced. Across units, offices, and roles, the interviewees demonstrated both a high degree of awareness and desire to respond to the crisis of educational equity for Pacific Islander students. Interviews reflected a striking agreement with student perspectives on some of the challenges faced by students and what needs to be done to improve outcomes for this community.

Importantly, this landscape survey across administrative levels and colleges revealed that administrators and faculty have, in recent years, fostered a number of new initiatives to increase and expand educational equity for PI students. For instance, UHM's College of Engineering is involved in increasing the number of PI students in their program and have been innovating recruitment practices by bringing in high school students from American Samoa to UH during the summer for a 3-week program engaging different types of engineering. The students who complete the program earn a preference when applying.

Another example is the UHM-Pasefika Passion Pipeline (3P), established in Fall 2015 with financial support from the Office of Vice President for Community College (OVP-UHCC). At the time, it was recognized that creating a method of transfer from the Community Colleges to UHM would be better accomplished with the support of an office dedicated to Pacific Island Student Success. Since its inception, 3P has been able to enroll more than 60 PI high school graduates into UHCCs and other UH campuses. Unfortunately, UHCC lacks the support for retention interventions and therefore the retention rate for PI students has been low. At the same time, 3P staff have realized that many PI high school students either drop out or lack the academic skills to survive at UH unless UHCC has the intent to provide necessary services and support for this student population.

Other notable examples of initiatives centered on PI students across UH include the Islands of Opportunity Alliance–LSAMP (IOA–LSAMP, UHH), The Pacific Islander Youth Empowerment for Success (PacYES, UHH), Kap'iolani Asia and Pacific Emphasis (KAPE, KCC), and the Pacific Basin University Affiliated Program (COE, UHM).<sup>8</sup> While each of these programs would require its own report regarding successes and obstacles in program goals, interviewees regularly asked how such innovative programs could be better supported and expanded to colleges, units, and departments. In other words, UH as a system already has an infrastructure of support in place, but needs to focus on how to better fund and utilize this structure.

Many of the interviewed faculty and some administrators indicated that public scholarship on issues related to the Pacific Islands was abundant when measured by the number of talks, departmental seminars, MA and doctoral defenses, film screenings, performance events, and conferences touching on the region and its peoples in any given semester. However, it was not clear that information about these events circulated broadly outside of particular units and/or their close disciplinary neighbors (partnered

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<sup>8</sup> Comparable initiatives were identified at CTAHR, SSRI, SeaGrant, SPAS, Windward, UHM CoE, and UHM's Provost Office, among others.



departments). Additionally, it would appear that the academic interest in the region seems disconnected with student success of students from the region.

Similarly, by asking about scholarship opportunities directly targeting Pacific Islander students across these various units or topics which may be of interest to students with heritage in the region, we identified over 17 scholarships or awards with an explicit focus on Pacific Islander students at UHM alone. However, in several of these conversations it became clear that faculty and staff are rarely aware of opportunities outside of their own units which may be available for their Pacific Islander students.

The interviews of staff, faculty, and administrators identified a variety of drivers that may play a role in Pacific Islander student educational equity, including:

- Scholarships, grants, departmental support and awards
- Events and better coordination between units
- Course options, pedagogical and curriculum development including language classes
- Regional partnerships via MOAs or MOUs
- Student exchange programs, field schools, community partnerships, student research opportunities
- East-West Center programs and collaborations
- Active student recruitment and outreach
- Funding for programs and initiatives
- Availability of a student-centered space
- Enhanced advising, including professional school pathways
- Research involvement and eliminating the asymmetry between grants where the focus is on the natural environment of the Pacific Island region rather than the people
- A focus on public health and wellbeing
- Understanding the differential needs between PI student communities,

Notable is a high degree of similarity between administrative and faculty perceptions. Perhaps surprisingly, the interviews also revealed a high degree of similarity to the opinions expressed by students, which suggests that faculty and administrators have in fact been “listening” and may even share key orientations towards needed advances.

### **III. Educational Equity for Pacific Islander Students Workshop (31 January 2020)**

The culminating action of the ELA grant was a Pacific Islander student educational equity convening with state leaders from the legislature, HI DOE (including several superintendents and principals), NGOs, Community Groups, and upper administration from across UH and several partner institutions such as Chaminade University. A list of participants are included in Appendix C.

With welcoming statements from Hawai'i Senate Majority Leader Kalani English and UH President David Lassner, the primary charge for this all-day gathering was to address the questions: *How do we make our institutions college student ready rather than students ready for college institutions? What makes a learning environment successful for PI students? How does it differ from teaching techniques today? What does it mean to decolonize higher education to ensure Pacific Island Student Success?*



After three short initial presentations on Pacific Islander student demographic data, student surveys, and faculty and administrative interviews, the primary work of the gathering was undertaken in four breakout sessions:

- What Is Equity?
- Beyond the University
- Best Practices
- Needs

Participants in the workshop were divided into one of these four groups with comparable representation from across the UH system, community groups, and administrative positions. The work and outcomes of the breakout sessions are summarized below.

#### A. What is Equity?

This group was tasked with thinking about educational equity both practically and conceptually within the UH system, within particular UH colleges and schools, and for Pacific Islander students.

A number of *key observations* emerged. Participants observed that there is a fundamental relationship between equity and social justice. Any consideration of educational equity for Pacific Islander students would be impossible in isolation. Participants noted, for instance, that equity in the present is hinged to equity in the past and the historic dynamics of settler colonialism in these islands and across the region. Thus, educational equity for Pacific Islander students is entangled in equity for other underserved student populations. Participants discussed how educational equity implies identifying key ‘action’ terms and, thus, grappling with displacement, hostility, unsafe spaces that should have been safe, underrepresentation, discriminatory practices across intersectional dimensions including gender and race. Systems are data driven, so the group asked how can there be a data-driven process that maps what students or faculty positioned within Pacific Islander communities feel but never quantify? For instance, the way that higher education measures and defines success in statistics around recruitment, retention, graduation may not map easily onto PI students’ own senses of success. Access was identified as a key to equity, as was representation. Those interested in grappling with the legacies of European colonial projects and the social inequities and asymmetries they have fostered in higher education should thus begin first by identifying what steps need to be taken. A critical take away from these high level discussions was that educational equity requires a total system approach. In order to address educational equity at UH or within particular UH universities, colleges, or schools we will need to work as a system.

This group identified a series of *insights and next steps*:

- Discussion on meaningful relationships are and how they help close gap in student success. Build connections by creating relationships outside the classroom. Without developing cultural relationships we cannot address the rest. We need to go beyond teacher/faculty responsibility and do things we wouldn’t normally do. “We really need to look at who we serve, what we serve, and how we are doing it.”
- Create campus communities including peer-to-peer support that can take care of the basics with love and respect.
- Provide advising and foster institutional support for student decision-making. “We want students to succeed in whatever pathway they chose, which means enabling them to change course.” Students need to know about scholarship availability and how to get access to technology,



housing, and tuition support. Many PI students may have no idea whom to ask for help and may believe the campus does not seem to care about them.

- Build a canoe house so there is a space for counseling outside the four walls of a building.
- Provide support for completing financial aid forms that are complicated and for which parents may not have adequate records.
- Scale up successes like those experienced at Windward CC that has targeted B and C students and provided them with a light touch approach to encourage them to do well in early college.
- Assess and modify the way we measure and define success – recruitment, retention, graduation – because these metrics are not always the same definitions of success held by PI students.
- Provide support for and representation of PI student organizations in student governance and engagement with the institution.

### **B. Beyond the University**

This group was tasked with thinking about educational equity as something that connects UH and its institutions to other contexts including the Department of Education schools that prepare students to enter UH, to community groups, and obligations to family.

This group reported on several *key insights* and offered a series of *next steps*.

- There is a need for more student advocates on campuses. The development of student clubs and increase of PI student campus leadership across UH would be a great benefit to many processes.
- Soliciting voices from the students and looking for student leadership towards meaningful structural innovations will result in advancing needs.
- Identify faculty who can mentor and advocate for PI students.
- Reclaim Pacific Island knowledge and history. Invest in understanding the fundamentals of diverse Pacific Islander cultures as well as the key values that are broadly shared across Oceania's peoples. Students are often shy and some do not know their own history. Thus, it is important to understand PI history so students can advocate for themselves. The University system needs to develop an appreciation for culture and for the students' home communities. Such an appreciation can be framed as understanding in terms of social justice.
- Invite everyone! The failure to recognize and respect the presence of diversity and differences within the Pacific Islander student community (and between the regional communities in which our students are rooted) is a not-so-subtle form of erasure. We would all do well to recall, with the Kiribati scholar Teresia Teaiwa that Oceania is the world's largest and most diverse geographical, political, and sociocultural region.
- Invite the Pacific Islander community to the table. Work must be done to create a shift so that Pacific Islander community members can sit at the table of the state-wide institutions.
- Build a foundation of kinship, reciprocity, trust, and respect that will benefit relationships between UH and the families and communities it serves.
- Use the example developed by the Native Hawaiian community within the UH System as a model for advancing the needs of the PI student community.
- Develop champions in the broader community to help fundraise to support scholarships for PI students.
- Advocate for PI students with the legislature or Board of Regents.
- Develop a mentoring structure preparing students beyond college life.
- Recruit PI students to become K-12 teachers/train more PI teachers.



- Seek representation of PI staff and faculty in University positions beyond cultural centers.
- Support advising and developmental needs for early college pathways.

**C. Best practices (What best practices are we doing now?) and Needs**

This group was tasked with thinking about educational equity and identify what best practices exist already in the UH System but also best practices we can learn from others. This group reported on *key insights* and *next steps*.

- That availability of high-quality, comfortable, generative, safe physical spaces that foster community connections is a significant best practice. UH Hilo has a space where PI students can come and meet. UHWO has a space for PI students.
- Support for student-led creation of structures of belonging is another high-impact practice: students can create excellent support networks for others who are new and entering. Currently this happens across UH via a range of self-organized student-groups. PI clubs—also popular at Chaminade—that can come together for cultural nights. Chaminade has a larger Pacific group but also regional/island-specific groups.
- Streamlining the award process for scholarships for Pacific Islanders who may need supports in navigating these complex applications. Example: UH Hilo – if you apply for FASFA you are awarded a scholarship if you meet the criteria.
- Outreach to churches with Pacific Islands communities to build connections. Chaminade has a church connection that is important to its PI Students.
- Food security is a striking challenge for many students. HCC collects food from restaurants and distributes to students. If students are not worried about sourcing food they can focus on class and coursework
- Community-based service learning opportunities within courses or for credit can promote student success by connecting college/university contexts to material outcomes.
- Acts of kindness by faculty and staff demonstrate that they value students.
- Establish a regular communication/network-meeting like this session statewide.
- Find student voices. We cannot say we represent PI without a PI face or voice.
- Establish a community advisory board. Churches may be integrated into such an advisory board.
- Build connections and advance existing success among units/programs/institutions that already have these best practices, so we don't have to reinvent the wheel.
- Leverage PI-focused philanthropy by identifying companies willing to give.
- Create a position that would bring together all PI issues/studies and outreach instead of having small siloes have an office that could oversee all of the different PI work.
- We need a mentorship structure that prepares students for life beyond college.
- Advancing work with high schools that have high numbers of PI students to develop college pathways.

**IV. UH Pacific Islander Faculty**

The final action under the Lumina grant was a follow up listening session with Pacific Islander faculty. Faculty from across the UH System were invited to a working lunch and approximately 20 faculty were able to attend. The session was a 90-minute collective discussion of Pacific Islander student success from the point of view of the faculty, with the faculty split into four small groups each with its own graduate student reporter. For faculty working directly with Pacific Island students, this workshop fostered a frank,





sensitive conversation about how best to enhance and facilitate student success and the specific resources that we currently lack or that could be deployed differently to make a difference. After the first hour of small-group discussions, each of the four tables reported back to the whole group, followed by a short general discussion.

While faculty ultimately represent unique experiences and points of view, it was possible to identify key take-away points from the small group and general discussions. These include:

- There is a perception among the faculty that student advising, including course selection, major selection, and career/professional advising, is a significant dynamic with enormous opportunity for improvement towards educational equity for PI students.
- Faculty noted that professional development opportunities for students and support in job tracking was needed to help Pacific Islander students answer the question of why they should take an advanced degree.
- Faculty noted the need for a longitudinal study of Pacific Islander graduates and the potential value of better tracking of PI student alumni.
- The value of faculty-led study abroad and field-school opportunities for students and faculty alike was affirmed.
- A re-examination and potential re-engagement with other regional universities was encouraged. The possibility of developing online co-teaching opportunities with partner universities such as USP or the University of Waikato was suggested.
- Multiple faculty noted the challenge for many students who have heritage in both the Kanaka Maoli/Oiwi community and one or more other Pacific Islander communities in navigating interests and commitments to both. As one professor put it, what is the Hawaiian/Pacific Islands connectivity pathway and how could we enhance this connectivity?
- Increased funding or material support for units that directly enhance educational equity for Pacific Islander students, including SEED, 3P, CPIS, Ethnic Studies, and IPLL.
- Space for Pacific Islander students appears to be perceived as one of the single most obvious, low-hanging and yet unachieved material supports; one faculty member noted that at UHM, available spaces for PI students were currently “horrendous.”
- Faculty encouraged efforts by unit leads to more actively explore concurrent degrees between PACS, IPLL, Ethnic Studies, Hawaiian Studies and other units that would enhance Pacific Islander students’ sense of an intellectual and regionally-grounded/sensitive experience at UH.
- Faculty observed that the general faculty at-large appears to have little understanding that many Pacific Islander students studying at UH may actually be second language learners of English or, conversely, may not have studied their own language formally, raising questions of what forms language competency assessment should take.
- Skepticism around the idea that UH is living up to its claims/responsibilities as an “indigenous serving institution” was a common theme. Several faculty discussed the suggestion that requiring 6 credits of HAP would be a meaningful advance. As one faculty member put it, “if you want to tell us there’s a commitment here, where’s that focus?”
- Faculty were acutely aware of the numerous and varied family and community obligations experienced by many Pacific Islander students, a strong suggestion that university develop non-punitive policies that support PI students in meeting both their cultural and institutional obligations (e.g. leave policies around deaths in the family for persons whose cultures may require significant periods of mourning including return to home communities).



- Increased cultural awareness and sensitivity to aspects of any Pacific Islander community member that might “affect the way they learn” via faculty training and policy was encouraged.
- One faculty member raised the challenging question, “How could the university take direct action to diversify and revise policy that maintains racist attitudes?”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of work undertaken through the Equity Leadership Acceleration grant towards assessing the status of educational equity for Pacific Islander students attending the University of Hawai‘i, the grant team proposes the following recommendations. We note that some of these recommendations echo those of the 1994 *O Le Sulufa‘iga: Report of the University of Hawai‘i Task Force on Samoans and Pacific Islanders in Higher Education* while others echo the recent recommendations that came out of the summer 2019 UHM-COFA Intersections Workshop.

1. *Develop an office dedicated to enhancing educational equity for PI students.* The equity needs of the PI student community are not new and it is clear from our work that significant awareness and prior efforts across UH and notably at UHM, have not to date been successful. Indeed, in recent years some aspects of educational equity for this community may be declining. This new office should work to coordinate, extend, and complement existing student support programs, offices, and opportunities focused on each of these three groups for recruitment, matriculation, retention, program success and degree completion.
2. *A Space and Place for Students.* Create vibrant spaces for Pacific Island and Pacific Island-interested students, to engage their unique needs and contributions to the University community. Identify and create a high-quality meeting space to be dedicated to the use of UHM students interested in Pacific Island topics. This space should allow for access to mentorship and resources enabling their success. Support the establishment of a student organization for graduate students working in the Pacific Islands to collectively network and provide resources to learn language, travel and research etiquette.
3. *Develop a UH System/HI state plan for long term educational equity for Pacific Islander Students.* By comparison, higher education in Aotearoa/New Zealand has recently been guided by Ka Hikitia, a strategy to improve how the education systems in New Zealand perform to ensure Māori students are gaining the “skills, qualifications and knowledge they need to enjoy and achieving education success as Māori.”<sup>9</sup>
4. *Aggressively seek ways to reduce tuition costs for non-Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) students.* Such tuition costs should be addressed for all three categories of NHPI students (citizens of regional states studying abroad in Hawai‘i on student visas, legally resident non-US citizens from sovereign Pacific nations with COFA agreements and US citizens from the insular territories, and residents of Hawai‘i or the continental United States who are heritage students in the region).
5. *Disaggregate Pacific Islander students in the various assessment tools used by UH for better understanding individual and collective student needs in terms of educational equity.* Insights from diverse stakeholders engaged through this report suggest that Pacific Islander students who are US citizens from the US affiliated territories—e.g. American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands—have distinct needs and significantly different student experiences than the rapidly and

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/ka-hikitia-accelerating-success-20132017/>



significantly growing number of non-citizen students from the COFA states—e.g. Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

*6. Devote material resources to better scaffolding/support for a pathway from community college to UH four-year institutions.* Compared with non-minority or East Asian students attending UHM and other UH system schools, a notably higher proportion of PI students begins postsecondary in the UH or other US community college context. PI students need retention programs to help them complete the AA degree and then successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. Too many PIs at a UHCC drop-out due to lack of retention programs specific to their needs. We propose to enhance and/or develop assessment measures geared to identifying needs and potentials to support students transitioning to University from within or after completion of an Associate degree. The community colleges have identified Pacific Islanders as a high need group in their strategic directions and have set enrollment targets for this group. As part of this effort, they have supported the work of the Office of Multicultural Student Services (Pasefika Passion Pipeline or 3P). The 3P effort provides tutoring and mentoring of high school students, admissions and FAFSA support, along with community outreach. They also offer summer bridge programs at three community college campuses. [http://uhcc.hawaii.edu/ovpcc/strategic/strategic\\_directions.php](http://uhcc.hawaii.edu/ovpcc/strategic/strategic_directions.php). Furthermore, P-20 has supported middle and high school students in a summer college experience program and has supported college students as mentors for the program to help increase student awareness of STEM majors and college information.

*7. Advance in-state partnerships with high-level policy makers in the HI State Legislature and HI DOE towards improving equity outcomes for these three student groups.* Significant interest and awareness of the equity needs of this student community among state leaders broadly and in primary and secondary education, could be more consistently coordinated with long-term student trajectories towards recruitment and enrollment at UH. Given the excellence of the UH system, we should be discomfited by statistics which suggest that more HI-raised PI students are leaving for the continental United States for college or post-graduate degrees.

*8. Reexamine the organizational status of work on educational equity for UH.* Currently, "equity" issues for UH are organizationally located within Campus Climate and Conflict Management and appear to be framed in terms of training and educational programs, as opposed to enrollment, retention, or achievement equity, or under the student success category where educational equity is framed around disability and gender rights. Meanwhile, OMSS is tasked with providing services such as tutoring, advising, etc. for our underserved populations, but only Filipinos, SE Asians, and Samoans are identified as priority communities.

*9. Identify HI, US west-coast, and US affiliated islands stakeholders and community leads (NGOs, not-for-profits, UH or HI DOE programs) working to support equity outcomes for the three PI student groups.* We observed clear opportunities to organize and facilitate workshops laying the groundwork for a state coalition improving educational equity outcomes, including increasing retention and degree completion for each of these groups.

*10. Increase direct funding for existing initiatives.* Lack of availability of funding for departmental and college level initiatives for Pacific Islander, Hawaiian, and other under-represented students was nearly universally reported as the most obvious essential problem in educational equity.

*11. Examine the state of and, when possible, renew and reenergize relationships with regional university partners.* Already established MOUs or MOAs with universities across the Pacific, which were designed to facilitate faculty and student exchanges and support the needs of students with heritage connections to the region, are rarely activated. Faculty and administrators in only a few units reported experiences taking advantage of the existing MOU/MOA relationships, including interacting directly with students from the region.



12. *Develop more opportunities for UH students to identify, prepare for, and participate in study abroad across the region.* Study abroad for students who are also engaged in heritage learning has been shown in the literature to be highly motivating towards academic achievement. Field schools and student development workshops are regularly held across the region by various units. Summer field schools could be particularly cost-effective (for instance, the CPIS / Australian National University Summer 2019 Field School in Palau).

13. *Identify and explore scholarship opportunities for regional students.* China has recently increased its annual full-ride scholarship programs in three Pacific nations to include hundreds of scholarships per year. We too could identify opportunities to provide better financial and other support for students in recruitment, retention, and graduation.

14. *Promote Research Best Practices.* Develop and promote a Research Ethics and Best Practices Protocol for UHM researchers conducting work in Micronesia and across Oceania. Establish a working group with stakeholder units across UHM, the UH System and the broader community. Build off of existing frameworks; for example, the Sea Grant program Kūlana Noi'i. Best practices should reflect multi-disciplinary needs as well as input from RMI, FSM, Palau and other Pacific Island countries where UHM researchers and students conduct work.

15. *A Pacific-Islands Focused Research and Community Series.* Develop and promote an annual workshop series for faculty/students doing research in RMI, FSM, Palau and/or Pacific Island countries, for sharing, providing feedback, and increasing research support in this area—particularly supporting research engagement with local communities.

16. *Create a More Systematic Presence and Role for UHM with External Partners.* Promote and have more of a presence in Pacific Islanders celebrations locally and on campus, such as Marshallese Education Day. This could also mean more strategic partnering with the East West Center as a research and communications hub.

17. *Foster an initiative to coordinate between units engaged in Pacific Studies.* This could be a formal and programmatic structure, an initiative creating opportunities for informal educational/social contact, or both.

It is noted that the Spring 2020 semester unfortunately was disrupted by the COVID pandemic that made additional face-to-face meetings untenable and diverted attention towards emergency planning. Nevertheless, these recommendations inform a broader conversation and actions needed to promote equity for Pacific Island students at the University of Hawai'i.



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## VI. Appendix B: Campus Retention Rates

### University of Hawai'i Community Colleges

Retention Rates of Pacific Islander (Ethnicity) Students, First-Time, Freshmen Full-Time

Cohort	Headcount	Enrolled, Fall (%)						
		2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Fall 2005	70	38.6%	18.6%	12.9%	2.9%	1.4%	7.1%	7.1%
Fall 2006	72	52.8%	33.3%	18.1%	11.1%	9.7%	5.6%	4.2%
Fall 2007	82	58.5%	34.1%	12.2%	8.5%	9.8%	3.7%	0.0%
Fall 2008	81	46.9%	27.2%	21.0%	12.3%	8.6%	7.4%	3.7%
Fall 2009	95	47.4%	32.6%	11.6%	7.4%	2.1%	4.2%	4.2%
Fall 2010	100	46.0%	29.0%	12.0%	8.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Fall 2011	87	52.9%	29.9%	13.8%	8.0%	5.7%	1.1%	1.1%
Fall 2012	81	46.9%	21.0%	9.9%	2.5%	1.2%	1.2%	
Fall 2013	87	44.8%	27.6%	13.8%	1.1%	4.6%		
Fall 2014	86	48.8%	38.4%	12.8%	4.7%			
Fall 2015	84	50.0%	31.0%	15.5%				
Fall 2016	93	51.6%	24.7%					
Fall 2017	104	50.0%						
Fall 2018	73							



**University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

Retention Rates of Pacific Islander (Ethnicity) Students, First-Time, Freshmen Full-Time

Cohort	Headcount	Enrolled, Fall (%)						
		2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Fall 2005	17	70.6%	82.4%	64.7%	58.8%	5.9%	5.9%	0.0%
Fall 2006	30	83.3%	80.0%	80.0%	56.7%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Fall 2007	18	77.8%	83.3%	72.2%	50.0%	27.8%	11.1%	5.6%
Fall 2008	34	79.4%	61.8%	58.8%	52.9%	8.8%	2.9%	0.0%
Fall 2009	31	77.4%	67.7%	64.5%	41.9%	12.9%	6.5%	0.0%
Fall 2010	22	81.8%	72.7%	68.2%	54.5%	27.3%	4.5%	9.1%
Fall 2011	10	90.0%	80.0%	90.0%	70.0%	30.0%	20.0%	
Fall 2012	18	61.1%	55.6%	66.7%	44.4%	11.1%		
Fall 2013	24	58.3%	54.2%	45.8%	37.5%			
Fall 2014	15	73.3%	60.0%	53.3%	20.0%			
Fall 2015	14	64.3%	57.1%	64.3%				
Fall 2016	33	66.7%	60.6%					
Fall 2017	24	66.7%						
Fall 2018	27							



**University of Hawai'i at Hilo**

Retention Rates of Pacific Islander (Ethnicity) Students, First-Time, Freshmen Full-time

Cohort	Headcount	Enrolled, Fall (%)						
		2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Fall 2005	17	64.7%	64.7%	47.1%	41.2%	41.2%	23.5%	0.0%
Fall 2006	16	62.5%	50.0%	43.8%	43.8%	18.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Fall 2007	15	40.0%	46.7%	33.3%	26.7%	20.0%	6.7%	6.7%
Fall 2008	21	71.4%	38.1%	28.6%	28.6%	9.5%	9.5%	4.8%
Fall 2009	20	75.0%	50.0%	50.0%	30.0%	10.0%	5.0%	0.0%
Fall 2010	7	71.4%	85.7%	71.4%	57.1%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Fall 2011	10	60.0%	40.0%	40.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%
Fall 2012	11	54.5%	54.5%	45.5%	9.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Fall 2013	34	64.7%	52.9%	41.2%	38.2%	17.6%		
Fall 2014	13	61.5%	53.8%	46.2%	38.5%			
Fall 2015	18	61.1%	50.0%	33.3%				
Fall 2016	13	69.2%	46.2%					
Fall 2017	12	83.3%						
Fall 2018	17							



**University of Hawai'i - West O'ahu**

Retention Rates of Pacific Islander (Ethnicity) Students, First-Time, Freshmen Full-Time

Cohort	Headcount	Enrolled, Fall (%)						
		2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th
Fall 2009	4	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Fall 2013	4	75.0%	75.0%	75.0%	50.0%	0.0%		
Fall 2014	4	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%			
Fall 2015	4	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%				
Fall 2016	5	40.0%	20.0%					
Fall 2017	8	62.5%						
Fall 2018	4							



## VII. Appendix C: Participants in the Lumina Project and State-wide convening

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