

UHM-“COFA” Intersections Workshop

Summary and Key Takeaways

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On July 15, 2019, the Office of the Provost, Institute of Sustainability and Resilience (ISR) and Center for Pacific Island Studies (CPIS) co-hosted a meeting of faculty, staff, and researchers at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) who work and/or conduct research in island nations whose relations with the United States and Hawai'i are governed by bilateral treaties generally referred to as the Compacts of Free Association (COFA). ISR aims to foster cross-campus, multidisciplinary curricular programs and research in sustainability and resilience, organized under the Office of the Provost. The CPIS, in the School of Pacific and Asian Studies, is an academic department as well as a larger home for initiatives that bring together people and resources to promote an understanding of the Pacific Islands and issues of concern to Pacific Islanders. CPIS serves as the only National Resource Center with Title 6 funding for Pacific Islands Studies.

The objective of the Workshop was to conduct a landscape assessment of the UHM efforts related to the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau. Although many of the global forces faced by these nations—such as climate change, coastal erosion and land loss, globalization, migration, inaccessibility to health, informatics and educational resources—are faced imminently by other island states in Oceania, the renegotiation of the COFA treaties slated to occur in 2023 with the U.S. present urgency in convening of a meeting focused on UHM's multiple engagements with these particular communities. Discussion during the meeting focused around the questions:

- How can UHM better coordinate and act on research and curriculum across the Pacific, particularly given the urgency of health and climate crises and the potential change in relationships between these states, their peoples, and the US and Hawai'i?
 - What synergies might exist between programs/units working within FSM, RMI and Paul, including the diaspora?
 - What programs/units are missing from this conversation? Specific faculty?
 - What other groups (educational, nonprofit, research, etc.) could UHM partner with more systematically?

The format of the afternoon meeting included 20 “lightning talks” to share work and research related to efforts in and related to FSM, RMI and Palau communities, followed by small group discussions to foster ideation around areas of needs and potential for capacity building towards greater coordination of research and efforts related to this part of Oceania for UHM.

Overarching Themes

- UHM faculty, staff, and researchers have worked within and sometimes with RMI, FSM, and Palau for decades. In the 1940s and 1950s this work included support for the US naval and later Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) administration and governance of the region; subsequent work included anthropological, botanical and other projects included some which famously supported and lead to the re-establishment of Polynesian voyaging as a transformative moment in Hawaiian/Hawai'i's history. A great deal of work over more recent decades has taken place in the context of the legacies of US nuclear weapons testing and US administration of the region prior to the decolonization and independence of these island states, and broadly currently encompassing:
 - Issues of healthcare, mainly through providing tools to carry out health care options locally, such as through telehealth and teaching people to make physical therapy equipment with resources available;
 - Teaching teachers, sharing and co-creating curriculum, and providing local language textbooks with place-relevant material;
 - Making degrees and professional programs available to residents through distance learning and strategic partnerships;
 - Encouraging the continuity of local cultural knowledge, particularly in ethnobotany, ecology, and navigation; and
 - Providing expertise in contemporary global forces, such as climate change, sea level rise, coastal erosion, and adaptation.
- UHM faculty, staff, and researchers work with the Micronesian diaspora in Hawai'i and on the West Coast and elsewhere across the US conducting research and providing resources and expertise related to discrimination and bias in healthcare and housing access, and detrimental policies that impinge upon rights.
- UHM faculty, staff, and researchers work to foster an environment on campus that promotes the success of students from or with heritage in Pacific Island nations and their communities.

Language, Cultural Literacy, and Ethnoecology

CPIS is active in many projects across all five of the bullet points above. In just the last five years, CPIS specialists, faculty and staff have supported health initiatives, conducted educator workshops, consulted on national educational strategic plans, conducted field schools, produced textbooks for adoption by the RMI, films about community issues, published, and conducted field research in the social sciences. For instance, Dr. Alexander Mawyer and colleagues collaborated with the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)/Smithsonian

Institute on an ethnobotanical and linguist project documenting local ecological and material cultural knowledge about objects currently in the Smithsonian in the Chuuk Lagoon islands as part of a digital return project. Earlier in 2019, with funding from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, CPIS helped to organize and run a “Blue Economy” workshop with colleagues from across this part of Oceania and beyond. In addition to research and outreach efforts, CPIS faculty also steward courses related to the Pacific Islands and their languages. Dr. Mark Merlin of the **Botany** department, who has worked for three decades in Micronesia, has authored six environmental education textbooks for different areas in Micronesia. Dr. Merlin stewards a large botanical database for the RMI is hosted by CPIS as a notable example of cross-unit collaboration. Led by Associate Professor Jaimey Hamilton Faris, the **Art** department at UH Mānoa features exhibitions that bring a cultural and ecological connection through art. She is planning an exhibit called “Inundation: Art and climate change in the Pacific” to features art and artists that explore the layered histories of shifting shorelines. Dr. Dina Yoshimi heads the **Hawai‘i Language Roadmap Initiative** for biliteracy. Marshallese and Chuukese are amongst the top 25 languages spoken in the state of Hawai‘i, but there is a need to develop proficiency assessments for Seals of Biliteracy for these languages.

Communications and Informatics

The Social Science Research Center in the College of Social Sciences houses the **Telecommunications and Social Informatics Research Program (TASI)/ Pacific Health Informatics and Data Center (PHIDC)**. TASI/PHIDC conducts interdisciplinary and applied research in Hawai‘i and the Pacific Islands Region that includes instruction, training and support services in addition to policy and program technical assistance in areas related to health and telehealth, accessible and affordable information and communication technologies (ICT), and weather and disaster communications.

Health and Health Education

Under the University of Hawai‘i System, the **Health Science Policy** is an effort to address community health needs through policy proposals in the state and beyond through their program UHealthy Hawai‘i. The program is built on partnerships to make connections to meet the health needs of communities. Among the priority areas, UHealthy Hawai‘i focuses on health in the Pacific region through the lens of Social Justice. TASI/PHIDC also works to support critical health access through telehealth efforts in Pacific island nations by providing both remote medical consultations and services, as well as medical education and mentoring. Moreover, the John A. Burns School of Medicine and the University of Hawai‘i Cancer Center participates with partner organizations in the Pacific region that form the Pacific Cancer Coalition which administers a Pacific Cancer Control Program that enables resource sharing across the region.

Law and Policy

The William S. Richardson School of Law has strong connections to the Pacific Islands. The Law School partners with the Pacific Islands Legal Institute and trains Pacific Island lay judges.

Among the programs at the law school is also the **Refugee and Immigration Law Clinic** provides clinical practice opportunities for students in this context by responding to real community needs and addressing authentic justice. Other specific research addresses policy issues surrounding the COFA diaspora in Hawai'i. Dr. Tim Halliday in the **Economics** department conducted a study to understand the impacts among migrants to Hawai'i within the COFA, with the required switch off of Medicaid that expired in 2015 in Hawai'i for most migrants to private health insurance options. He found that there was a net decline in medical consumption that may be attributable to either increased prevention or a reduction in needed care. Dr. Rebecca Stotzer in the **School of Social Work** conducted a study of bias experienced by Micronesian cultures, including discrimination experienced in health settings, workplace discrimination, and public accommodation. In total 1 in 4 respondents experienced some form of discrimination or bias crime.

Natural Sciences and Knowledge Exchange

Under the School of Ocean, Earth Sciences, and Technology (SOEST), **Sea Grant** conducts research and outreach related to the health and vitality of coastal resources and communities. Because Hawai'i faces comparable issues as other Pacific Islands, knowledge sharing is key to partnerships across islands. Sea Grant has an extension agent working in RMI. Dr. Chip Fletcher, Professor of **Earth Sciences**, conducts research related to sea level rise impacts and flood risk mapping on RMI. Similarly, the **Hawai'i Institute of Geophysics and Planetology** conducts research in coastal geological processes that can be readily shared across island communities.

Education

The **Institute for Teacher Education (ITE)** in the College of Education is working with Pacific island communities with a focus on the educational needs of children and adolescents, teaching, learning, and curriculum. Amongst the degree programs offered is the online PACMED Master Degree Program that initiated in 2019. The College also offers a Related Services Assistant Certificate Program, which is a project since 1994 to teach children with disabilities. This effort is led by Dr. Katherine Ratliffe to address a critical need where there is a shortage of training and services available to service the needs of children with disabilities. She also leads the Navigating Student Success across the Pacific (NSSP) program through the College of the Marshall Islands to train teachers to serve the needs of children with severe disabilities. Additionally, Dr. Julie Walsh from **CPIS** has been employed by the RMI Historic Preservation Office, and served on the RMI Ministry of Education 5 year strategic planning committee, in addition to serving as lead author for the first RMI MOE 9th grade history textbook. Her long term professional and personal ties helped to bring Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner to UHM for the MA in Pacific Islands Studies (and who is also participating in the *Inundation Exhibit*).

Figure 1 below shows a network diagram of units at UHM, as well as the University system level, that are directly working on issues related to the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau.

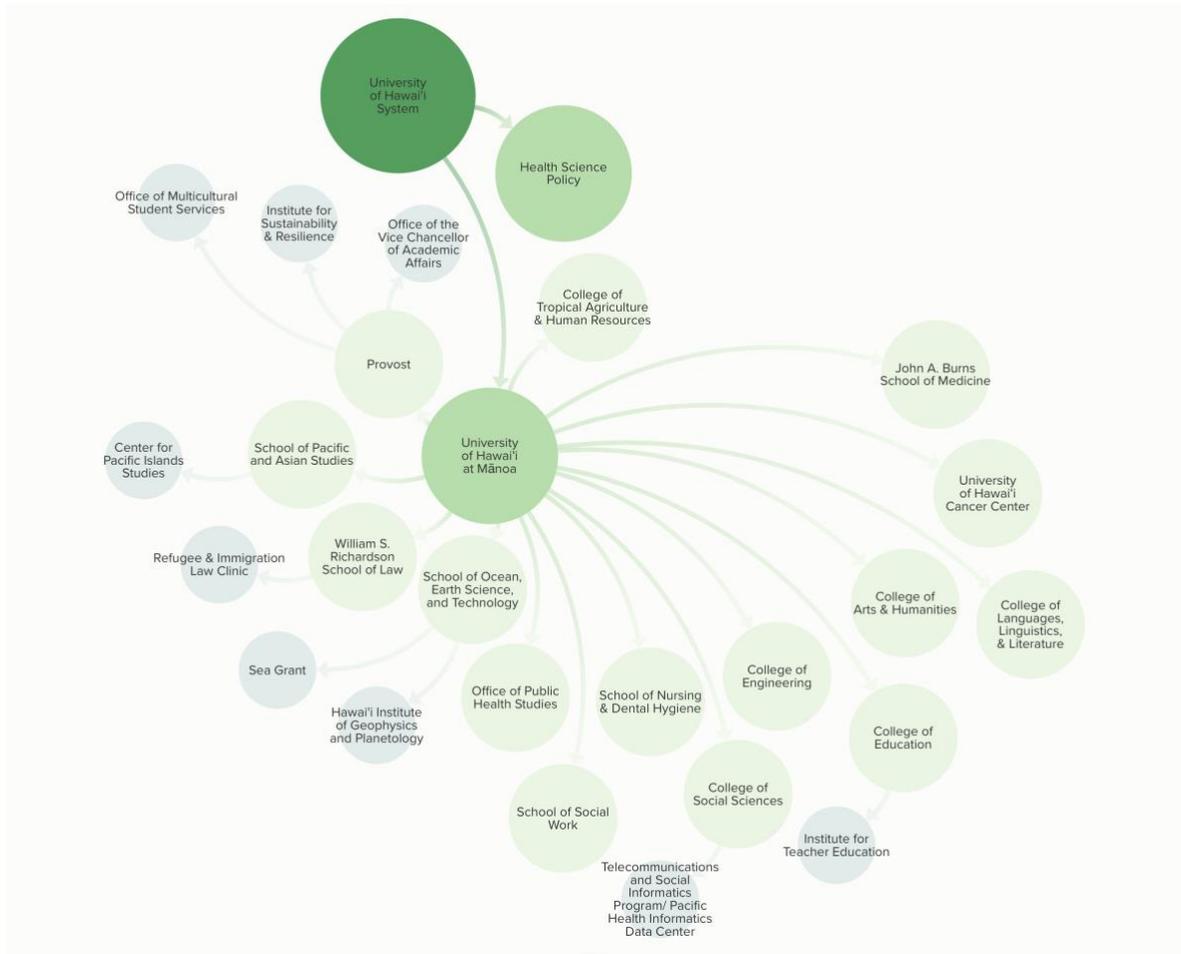


Figure 1. Identified Units with Ongoing Programs and Research Efforts Related to FSM, RMI and Palau

Summary of suggested actions and outcomes

Near-Term

- *Identify opportunities to complement and extend the July workshop.* Many participants noted that this rare inter-unit coordinating event was tremendously productive and evidenced enormous opportunities for individual professional development, university mission and unit mission advancement, the development of new scholarly and/or student-focused initiatives (for instance, better integrating regionally connected students in ongoing research in their home islands).
 - Further identify the status and place of research within the FSM, RMI, and Palau within UHM's units, including the relationship of research to teaching, student professional development, and curricular and extra-curricular supports for Pacific Islander students.

- Convene/support future workshops (possibly related to the current Lumina Grant led by Deborah Halbert and Alex Mawyer, amongst others) as well as extend to the broader region of Oceania.
- *A Space and Place for Students.* Create vibrant spaces and programs 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 aimed at 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.
- *Identify and explore scholarship opportunities for regional students.* China has recently increased its annual full-ride scholarship programs in all three of these nations to include hundreds of scholarships per year.
 - Identify opportunities to provide better financial and other supports for students from these regions towards recruitment, retention, and graduation.
- *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, 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.
- *A Pacific-Islands Focused Research and Community Series.* Develop and promote an annual workshop series for faculty/students conducting research in RMI, FSM, Palau and/or Pacific Island Nations, with the aims of sharing, providing feedback and increasing research support in this area particularly towards supporting research engagement with local communities.
- *Create a More Systematic Presence and Role for UHM with External Partners.* Promote and have more of a presence in celebrations of Pacific Islanders locally and on campus, such as Marshallese Education Day. Increase the visibility of Pacific Islanders at UH Mānoa also as student researchers, in their engagement in campus events, and communities through Office of MultiCultural Student Services student recruiting. This could also mean greater strategic partnering with East-West Center as a research and communication hub among other entities, such as We Are Oceania.

Longer-Term

- Expand mentoring opportunities for students arriving at UHM from FSM, RMI and Palau. [Potentially using the Richardson Law School model of Pacific Island student engagement to other degree programs.]
- Target additional faculty hires with Micronesia/Pacific expertise.
- Create an online platform to know who is working within the Pacific Islands nations and what they do.
- Form and offer more interdisciplinary classes around Pacific Islands issues.
- Determine how to take part in the COFA 2023 negotiations.
- Focus on promoting STEM programs in primary education to engage Pacific Island student interest in pursuing STEM degrees.
- Establish and enhance scholarship programs for Pacific Island residents, including preparatory programs to help students succeed with writing, English, speaking, science, and math skills.
- Expand and establish appropriate geography encompassing Pacific Islands conversations (e.g., expand the conversation from FSM/RMI/Palau to Oceania).
- Grow the idea “grand challenges” to create an innovative environment for addressing urgent issues faced by Pacific Islands, such as healthcare, education, climate change, cultural and environmental sustainability, rule of law, military and economic vitality.
- Develop stronger collaborations across units where intersections can be strengthened, perhaps rooted in CPIS to better leverage its well-established status as a National Resource Center for the region.
- Strengthen and leverage telecommunications infrastructure to accomplish outcomes.
- Promote cultural literacy, relational ethics, and co-production in conversation with academic, scientific, policy knowledges across geographies.

Concluding Remark

Although the workshop focused on the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau, many issues discussed also directly connect to broader challenges and opportunities facing Oceania and Pacific Islanders from across the region. Moreover, the nature of any research and work conducted with neighboring nations of Oceania and their people should uphold a reciprocal and fundamentally bidirectional exchange rooted in mutual regard and interest.

**UHM-“COFA” Intersections Workshop
July 15, 2019
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