

February 2, 2021

RE: Leeward Community College Legislative Relations Priorities

On behalf of the Legislative Relations Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate at Leeward Community College, I am writing to apprise you of faculty concerns in an effort to enact positive outcomes for college stakeholders through open collaboration, communication, and legislation.

Our topics of priority include the following:

1. Encouraging a clear government response to COVID-19 that facilitates a safe return to face-to-face interactions within higher education as vaccines become available.
2. Supporting lecturers as essential members of college faculty.

Elimination of lecturers has been a primary means of cost savings in the wake of the budget deficit caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Lecturers make up approximately one third of Leeward CC faculty and are particularly vulnerable due to their non-tenured status. One third of the lecturers surveyed reported a decrease in course load for the Fall semester. This number has grown as we moved into the current Spring semester. According to a survey done this past fall, over 70% of lecturers teach at least one class not currently taught by full-time faculty, and approximately 50% teach more than one of these types of courses, meaning lecturers provide much of the diversity of course offerings seen throughout the UH system. Additionally, over 50% of the lecturers' students reported not being able to tell the difference between lecturers and full-time faculty. Recognizing that lecturers are an integral resource for furthering the mission of the University of Hawaii system, we urge the legislature to support retention of lecturers with proven histories of excellence, and ensure continuation of affordable healthcare to newly un- or under-employed lecturers.

3. Protecting tenure to maintain freedom of speech, rigor, and quality of instruction and services.

Tenure does much more than provide job security. Tenure frees employees to freely exchange ideas and information without fear of reprisal from authorities. Tenure has allowed researchers to divulge less-than-savory information for the benefit of the public at large. The tenure process is one of the most rigorous probationary processes around, ensuring quality instruction and service. Maintaining tenured personnel keeps the University of Hawaii system competitive as an employer and to potential students seeking quality education.

4. Providing mental health support services to college students, faculty, and staff.

Although mandated, Leeward CC currently has no mental health professionals on staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for these services has increased.

5. Responding holistically and proactively to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting state deficit to promote positive outcomes for all college stakeholders.

In the wake of a severe budget reduction, UH is planning detrimental cost-cutting and re-organization measures, with the added possibility of furloughs or pay cuts. We need to respond proactively and holistically to current events based on our strengths, mission, and long-term goals, rather than quick, cost-saving measures alone. Fundraising should also be considered as a means for reducing the deficit. UHCCs are among the lowest cost institutions for higher education in the country. Leeward CC students reconfirmed the strengths of UH community colleges and Leeward CC in particular, citing the low cost to residents, high quality and variety of courses and faculty, and safety of attending school close to home during this pandemic. Many high school graduates in central and west O'ahu choose local community colleges to start their college education. Therefore, planning should be based on the overall performance of all programs and courses. By keeping a variety of programs and courses, we offer more options to current and potential students. When budget cuts cannot be avoided, it is important to explain the need and impact to all stakeholders.

6. Supporting teachers as a key driving force within our economy.

Hawaii needs to have a well-educated workforce to provide the necessary skills and expertise to grow the economy through applied knowledge and skills in diverse categories. This can only happen through vibrant and dedicated teachers who develop the workforce. Leeward CC is not a corporation. What we do is more meaningful and far-reaching than any single company. Higher education is an investment in the future and should not be looked at as a short-term balance sheet. The single resource exponential in growth is the human resource, which is difficult to quantify.

One aspect of this approach might include collaborating with the Department of Education to fill secondary school instructional vacancies with college faculty. This could be a win-win solution that would save jobs, reverse perennial teacher shortages at the high school level, enhance Leeward CC Early College project visibility, and provide the Leeward CC Education Division the important role of offering our instructors a path to certification. Filling these instructional needs benefits both high school and community college students.

Please consider the priorities above when drafting legislation that impacts Leeward CC, and feel free to reach out with questions or concerns regarding faculty perspectives. We look forward to working with you to ensure positive, effective outcomes that support Leeward Community College, and by extension, our community at large.