

CHAPTER 33

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

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*“Can a student get
a good education at
the University of Hawaii
at Manoa?”*

To get right to the point, “yes”. A good student can get a good education at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (which I usually call UH). It’s no surprise that *Money* magazine recently identified UH as one of the nation’s top colleges for the money. Tuition is affordable (\$615 per semester in 1992) compared to both private and public universities on the Mainland, and students from Oahu can cut expenses by living at home. Yet, in spite of the University’s many strong academic programs, students often graduate from UH with mediocre educations. The blame lies with all major players — faculty, administration and students.

UH, founded as a land-grant college in 1907, remained small and limited in scope until Governors Quinn (1959-1962) and Burns (1962-1973) dramatically increased the share of state revenues allocated to the university. By 1972 the UH budget had increased to 15.53 percent

of the state budget. The dramatic increases in UH funding came to an abrupt halt in the 1970s during Governor Ariyoshi's administration (1973-1986). Between 1972 and 1980 the UH budget, adjusted for inflation, actually fell by more than 10 percent. Faculty salaries became uncompetitive, and many excellent professors left for better-paying mainland universities. The morale of faculty and students was low, and the university seemed (at least to this writer who arrived as an assistant professor in 1981) to be anything but a dynamic institution.

Support during the 1980s. The downward slide stopped in 1980, and inflation-adjusted expenditures on UH increased by almost 4.5 percent a year over the 1981-1990 decade. The actual increase was even larger, as funding for extensive campus construction was included in the State's capital budget. In fiscal year 1989 (the most recent year for which comparison statistics are available) state per-capita expenditures on higher education were 21.3 percent above the national average. This places Hawaii eighteenth in the country and suggests that any problems at UH are not necessarily the result of inadequate state funding.

UH has a solid faculty, and the restoration of faculty salaries to more competitive levels in recent years should help to retain them. Some top-notch UH faculty members could move to a top-30 university, but stay because they enjoy living in Hawaii, have a unique research environment (such as clear skies on Mauna Kea), have easy travel access to Asia, or have colleagues who also specialize in Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific studies.

At many mainland state universities (the University of Washington at Seattle is one), undergraduate students have little access to the faculty during their freshman and sophomore years. Introductory classes are extremely large (500-800 students), many classes are handled by teaching assistants, and appointments with leading professors are difficult to arrange. By contrast, undergraduates at Manoa often have classes with the best faculty, introductory classes are 50 to 200 in most cases, almost all undergraduate classes are taught by regular faculty, and professors are generally accessible and willing to see students.

Why then did a 1991 poll of 1986 UH graduates identify "apathetic students and instructors" as the most disappointing aspect of UH? A

major problem is that the university pays little attention to how the faculty teaches. The administration has allocated funds to a new Center for Teaching Excellence, but it has had little impact on faculty teaching so far and the administration uses few carrots or sticks to motivate faculty. There are only a smattering of tangible rewards for good teaching, and the University makes little effort to monitor the quality of faculty teaching. It's no surprise that some professors prefer to emphasize research or their tennis game over teaching.

Still, every department has good teachers. If a student is willing to spend time finding out which professors and which courses are high quality, he or she can obtain a good education. Many prominent private and public universities facilitate student search for good courses and professors by editing and publishing student evaluations. At UH, however, the official student evaluations are confidential. Currently enrolled students can't find out how previous students evaluated the professor. Consequently, UH students are severely handicapped by lack of information on courses and faculty. The administration could quickly improve education at UH by publishing a booklet of edited student evaluations.

Shortcomings. Perhaps that story is indicative of a larger problem: a failure to provide services to students which would facilitate a good education. Few student advisors are available, although the legislature has increased funding for them in recent years. Hamilton Library has far too little study space, and job placement services are markedly deficient. A severe shortage of campus housing forces many students to commute long distances daily and little student parking is provided for the commuters. Any student not from a neighbor island has little chance of getting a dorm room—only 2 percent of undergraduate women and 10 percent of undergraduate men are housed in dormitories. Most UH students leave the campus after their classes. Consequently, campus activity is a pale shadow of the rich life found at many mainland universities.

All of these factors help to explain why many UH professors insist that their own children attend mainland colleges. UH offers a good academic education, but fails to offer the student the opportunities which make attending an excellent university a transforming experience.

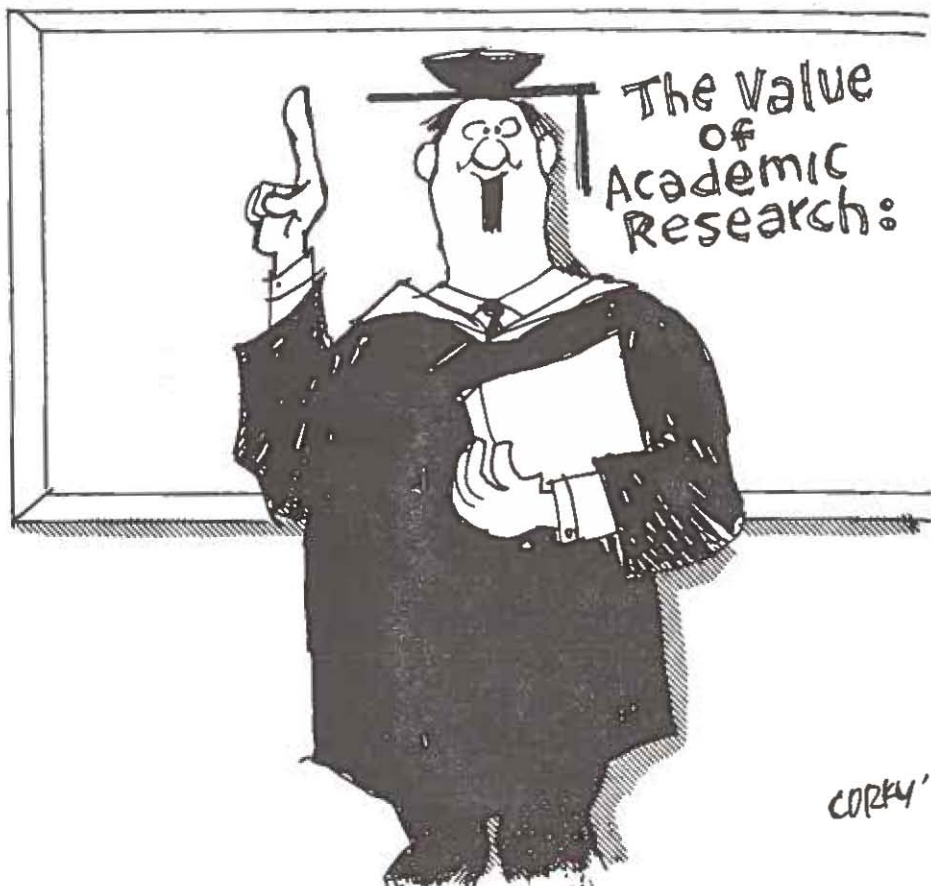
This brings us to UH's student body. When I recently asked

students in my introductory macroeconomics class why they enrolled, the overwhelming majority cited the class time and college requirements. Fewer than 10 percent of the students had gathered more specific information about me or the course. So why is the time slot for the class so important? At UH 90.3 percent of undergraduates have jobs, compared to 62.3 percent at mainland universities. In addition, conversations with my students lead me to believe that UH students work more hours than mainland students do. Time slots for classes are important to students who often want to bunch their classes in the morning so they can leave campus for their jobs in the afternoon. Working students typically have too little time to study, spend too little time on campus, and have too little interaction with other students.

Poor preparation. The problem of working students is compounded by the poor academic preparation many received in Hawaii's public schools. The average combined Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score of incoming UH students is 12 percent better than the average for all Hawaii test takers, and 10 percent above the U.S. average. This may sound respectable, but it is a deplorable record for a state's flagship university. A comparison with the average SAT scores from a few mainland schools is instructive. (Some Western schools are not included in Table 1 because they either do not report average SAT scores or use the ACT rather than the SAT.)

Table 1

<u>School</u>	<u>Average Combined SAT</u>
Univ. of Virginia	1,208
UC-Berkeley	1,197
Univ. of Wisconsin	1,099
Florida State Univ.	1,097
Univ. of Colorado	1,070
Univ. of Arizona	1,050
UC-Davis	1,050
Univ. of Washington	1,035
Univ. of Delaware	1,031
Univ. of Oregon	1,003
Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa	980
Univ. of Idaho	980



"IF FEWER OF OUR STUDENTS TAKE THE SAT,
THEN WE'LL HAVE LESS STUDENTS GETTING
MEDIocre SCORES,""

The UH freshmen's relatively low average SAT score indicates that many need additional study time if they are to achieve academic excellence. Too few, however, put forth the needed extra effort, as the combined effects of commuting and long hours on a job leave harried students little time or energy.

The combination of mixed faculty teaching, meager support services for students, poor preparation in high school, and too much student time spent on the freeway and on the job produces disappointing results. For example, 48 percent of the UH undergraduates who recently took the national Law School Admission Test (LSAT) earned scores in the top half of all test takers—by far the best showing of any college or university in Hawaii, but still stacking up poorly against the performances of undergraduates at other states' flagship universities. Table 2 lists the percentages from a few such mainland schools.

Table 2

<u>School</u>	<u>Percentage of Graduates In Top Half of LSAT</u>
Univ. of Virginia	79
Univ. of Colorado	71
Univ. of Wisconsin	71
Univ. of Washington	70
Univ. of Iowa	69
Univ. of Florida	66
Univ. of Kansas	65
Univ. of Missouri	65
Univ. of Oregon	64
Univ. of Utah	63
Univ. of Montana	61
Univ. of Arizona	60
Univ. of Idaho	60
Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa	48

This comparison suggests that UH is not doing a good job educating its students. Perhaps one reason for the poor performance is a certain provincialism at UH. Only 7 percent of undergraduate students are from the Mainland. If UH could attract more academically excellent students (possibly with reciprocal admission agreements with other state universities), students from Hawaii would be productively exposed to a broader cross section of the U.S. population. The University of Virginia is a good example of a state university that admits a large percentage of academically excellent students from outside Virginia who significantly improve the quality of its academic programs.

As long as students are spending more time on the freeway and on the job than at the university, many can forget about achieving academic excellence. If, however, a student makes the time commitment required to succeed in school and selects courses and professors carefully, that student *can* get a good education at UH. But *do* most students at UH get a good education?

Many motivated students get an excellent education; some are sandbagged by the lack of student services at UH; and others are unwilling to make the time commitments needed to succeed in school. Unless UH and its students both reexamine and change their priorities, the University of Hawaii at Manoa will be known as a good school for the money rather than as a good school.

