



COLLEGE OF NATURAL & APPLIED SCIENCES
WESTERN PACIFIC TROPICAL RESEARCH
CENTER

30 September 2022

To: Dean/Director
Via: Associate Director-Research

From: Ross Miller, Search Committee Chair

The search committee for the position of plant pathologist in WPTRC interviewed four candidates on 27 September 2022. All candidates appeared to have experience in plant disease diagnostics, in mycology and to a lesser extent virology, are current with the range of molecular techniques used in plant pathology diagnostics and research and have had experience with the US land-grant system in varying degrees as they pursued degree related and postdoctoral appointments at land-grant institutions. Of the four, only Dr. Glenn Dulla had in depth knowledge of Guam and Micronesia. All candidates expressed interest in the current state of the facilities, equipment, availability of start-up funds, availability of undergraduate and graduate student workers, availability of postdocs, and other issues related to establishing a vigorous research/teaching/outreach program at UOG. In the following discussion I will attempt to highlight differences between the candidates and note areas of their interests and background that would be particularly germane to UOG-WPTRC. In subsequent discussions the committee came to the following consensus and ranked the candidates as follows:

1. Glenn Dulla – Three members of the committee ranked Dr. Dulla as their first or second choice for the position while one member ranked him third. Dr. Dulla has a degree in microbiology from UC-Berkeley and has worked at the GovGuam Department of Agriculture for many years on issues related to plant pathology, invasive species identification and mitigation, local and national regulatory issues, and is currently teaching an upper division undergraduate course in plant pathology at UOG. He and his accomplishments are well known by the members of the committee. Some committee members felt that Dr. Dulla was too modest in his assessment of his plant pathology experience and in the significance of his accomplishments in arranging for RCUOG to administer grants he was awarded as part of his GovGuam efforts. The committee felt that his knowledge and commitment to Guam would complement his position at UOG. The committee also felt that his experience with regional and international organizations dealing with invasive species mitigation in Micronesia and his familiarity with Micronesia would enhance UOG's research plant pathology capability. The committee also felt that Dr. Dulla would be a congenial colleague that would mesh well with existing administrative and faculty in WPTRC and UOG Cooperative Extension.
2. Two candidates were essentially tied for the second rank. These were Dr. Leilani Dacones and Dr. Emran Ali. I will address these candidates separately.
 - a. Leilani Dacones - One committee member ranked Dr. Dacones second, one ranked her third, and two ranked her fourth. Dr. Dacones is currently a professor at a Philippine university with teaching and research responsibilities. Her area of expertise is fungal biology, with emphasis on the population biology of pathogens. In addition to basic research in fungal biology, Dr. Dacones' strength appeared to be her expertise as a teacher and the rapport and success she enjoys with students, many of whom are now

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graduating following a three year undergraduate program. She currently teaches courses in virology, mycology, and fungal genetics. In the committee's opinion she would be well qualified to handle undergraduate and graduate courses at UOG. Her long-term goals are to remain in academia in a teaching and research capacity. She has little experience with Micronesia but would like to establish contacts and assist in building capacity throughout the region. As she is currently emeshed in teaching and research responsibilities at her institution, she would be available to join UOG by the fall semester.

- b. Emran Ali - Two committee members ranked Dr. Alei second, and two ranked him third. The members who ranked him highest felt that he may be more suited to the plant pathology extension position than to the WPTRC research position. Dr. Ali was probably the most prepared of all the interviewees. He had obviously done his homework on UOG and on the pathology issues of Micronesia. Dr. Emran has completed several postdocs that have given him a broad background in various plant pathology disciplines. His primary area of expertise is mycology, but also has experience in virology through both laboratory and field research and through his extension efforts with growers on the US mainland. He has experience with the standard diagnostic tools of plant pathology, has worked with regulatory and research personnel in the federal government, and appears to be a very well rounded and experienced scientist who would be equally at home as a researcher or extension faculty member with teaching responsibilities. Dr. Ali was very voluble in the extremely detailed and comprehensive responses to the committee's questions. The committee felt that if he was hired, he would be a very energetic colleague. However, two members felt that with his intense rapid-fire style and private consulting endeavors better suited to the US market that he may also have difficulty relating to existing UOG faculty and to the local farming communities on Guam and in Micronesia.
3. Dr. Mana Ohkura – One committee member ranked Dr. Ohkura first, one ranked her second, and two ranked her fourth. Dr. Ohkura considers herself a mycologist and has experience with fungal diseases of tomatoes and other mainland crops. During the interview she appeared very nervous, but her resume on paper is quite impressive. Dr. Ohkura is widely traveled, having lived and/or worked in Japan, the US, New Zealand, and India. She considers herself primarily a laboratory oriented researcher, but as did the other candidates, employs a balance of laboratory work couple with hands-on field. Her postdoc experience has allowed her to interact with US mainland grower groups and her postdoctoral research has focused on addressing specific problems on specific diseases deemed important by grower groups. Perhaps her greatest strength is that she possesses a rather complete set of the “tools of the trade” including advanced molecular techniques coupled with old school morphological systematics that could be translated in address real world problems in Guam and throughout Micronesia. Her long-term career objectives are to establish an independent research and academic program within an academic institution.