

Committee on Student Affairs (CSA)

Spring 2020 Senate Committee Report

First, I want to thank all the senators and non-senators who brought their talents and ideas to the Committee on Student Affairs (CSA). Throughout the past academic year, the Committee engaged with experts to identify issues that are most important to our students. We sat down with Roxie Shabazz, the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Director of Admissions; Alex Khaddouma, Ph.D., one of the licensed psychologists at the Counseling and Student Development Center (CSDC); and Landon Li, the President of the Associated Students of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (ASUH). The Committee was grateful for their time and inspired by their commitment to improving the support for our students. From those dialogues, the Committee identified several challenges facing the students, a couple of which a future iteration of this Committee might consider taking on in partnership with one of the student stakeholders.

Landon Li provided an itinerary of projects that the students are working on and that the faculty and staff might throw their support behind. He grouped those projects into three categories: 1) sustainability; 2) student housing advocacy; and 3) mental health access. With initiatives to phase out plastic straws and utensils and non-biodegradable takeout containers on campus, the students are pushing UH towards zero waste by 2035. Housing on campus continues to frustrate the students. Student housing has mold issues, no air conditioning, and constant interruptions to the hot water, conditions the administration might address by redirecting monies or donations to student housing or impressing upon the Legislature to fulfill its affordable housing and revitalization promises. As to mental health access, the campus has about 9 licensed psychologists and a handful of psychology interns and therapists for a student population of 18,000. These numbers indicate that pre-COVID-19 the mental and emotional health needs of the students were not being met and implicate the importance of adding several more mental health professionals post-COVID-19 to address the residual effects of the pandemic on our students.

Alex Khaddouma, Ph.D., one of the licensed psychologists at the CSDC, discussed the challenges facing our students before and after COVID-19 and the resources available to help them. Alex and his colleagues offer full walk-in services for crisis intervention, including consultation for faculty and staff, and oversee the Counselors-in-Residence program for after-hours psychological support for residents of campus housing. Even during COVID-19 the Counselors-in-Residence program has been ongoing, as have consultations via teleconferencing and telehealth. Walk-in services continue, as well, provided the need for one is established by a prior communication between the counselor and student. These programs are critical to our students even in normal times considering our students fall within the age group most burdened by mental health issues and yet least likely to seek care for them. Now in this pandemic with

greater anxiety and yet fewer opportunities to interact with people, the continuation of these programs has been a real lifeline for our students who are struggling. Alex stressed being caring and cognizant of the residual effects on our students' mental health following this pandemic and he offered the CSDC's services to help guide faculty and staff interactions with, and support for, the students.

The student housing, affordability, and mental health issues that Landon and Alex identified as the big issues facing our students affect the admissions and retention issues that Roxie Shabazz is working on. Universities across the country anticipate a 25% drop in enrollment from 2025-2035 because of decreased birthrates. Ms. Shabazz stressed that the strategy to address falling enrollments cannot be based on increasing student numbers overall, outside specific demographic groups that should be better represented at UH, but rather the strategy should focus on retention. Admissions has several faculty recruiting and mentor programs, as well as visitation and admitted student programs, in place to improve the UH retention rate—faculty and staff, though, might throw greater support behind these programs as they are adjusted to function within the current COVID-19 environment.

Finally, Ms. Shabazz noted that an important component of retention is assisting students through crisis, further underscoring the symbiotic nature of the challenges facing the students and those facing the University. Advocating for the fiscal health and mental health of the students is advocacy for the fiscal health and mental health of the University. We hope each future iteration of this Committee adopts this philosophy and aligns itself with one of the student stakeholders to tackle one or two smaller issues within the larger issues that this Committee has identified. Mahalo.