

Previous and planned efforts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Division of Student Affairs (DSA)

The Division of Student Affairs (DSA), under the direction of the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, provides programming related to diversity, equity and inclusion for the student population at the University of Hawaii at Hilo. Below are specific offices and a variety of programs that are offered per their purview.

Kipuka Native Hawaiian Student Center

The vision of Kīpuka Native Hawaiian Student Center is to ensure a Hawaiian place of learning at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Kīpuka promotes Native Hawaiian student success through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive student support services and activities; supports the academic development and success of Native Hawaiians by promoting learning environments that are culturally responsive and appropriate; and implements community and cultural programs to increase educational opportunities for Native Hawaiian within Hawaiian and Pacific communities. Examples of programs provided are:

Eia Hawai'i Lecture Series

Community practitioners and presenters are invited to share their knowledge and expertise with UH Hilo students. This lecture series assists with broadening the indigenous worldview of our campus community.

Mālama Kaiāulu Community Service

This community service program engages students in community leadership and culturally place-based activities. Students are exposed to a variety of Hawaiian functional arts and Hawaiian cultural practices.

Aha Haumana Student Leadership Conference

This annual leadership conference exposes students to the concept of Aloha 'Āina, responsible stewardship of land and resources in Hawai'i. Students are invited to be part of a network with UH Hilo Native Hawaiian alumni in various conservation career fields, while creating stronger relationships with their peers.

Peer Mentoring

Kipuka employs 8 peer mentors each semester who are paired with incoming freshmen and transfer students. The peer mentors provide support to the new students through engagement with planned and facilitated cultural events.

Huliau Series: Broadening Perspectives Through Courageous Conversations

In partnership with the Equal Employment Office, this series of conversations provides a safe space for the UH Hilo community to become educated and engaged in critical conversations around racial disparities and systemic injustices through discussions, shared experiences, and guidance from informed community panelists.

Nā Pua No'eau

This grant funded program supports literacy and hands-on STEM cultural activities for Native Hawaiian students in grades PreK-12 and their 'ohana. Through this grant, efficiency and productivity are positively impacted by having activities that strengthen the pipeline from PreK-12 to the university to improve college readiness and increase college attendance for the Native Hawaiian population.

Kīpaepae Protocols

In partnership with the Hanakahi Council, the campus Native Hawaiian advisory council, Kipuka assists with hosting a variety of kīpaepae, indigenous protocols used to orient and engage students in Hawaiian cultural ceremonies. As a ceremony, kīpaepae is necessary for the introduction and transition into new spaces; it is a physical welcoming of an individual or individuals into a particular space as well as the nurturing of the spiritual transition into new environments and new understandings. The kīpaepae anchors the relationship of the spirit to its new environment. Encoded in the word kīpaepae are the words: kī, which means to direct focused energy; paepae which is to provide sustained support; and pae, which means to reach shore or land. Through this definition of kīpaepae, the individual(s) are recognized for reaching a particular platform and thus are being supported by a community in which all their energies are focused and dedicated to the affirmation of coming ashore, in reaching a newness, and together physically and spiritually being reacquainted to one another, to the environment, to the space, and to the encompassing energies.

International Student Services

The core mission of International Student Services (ISS) is to facilitate the success (academic success as well as personal development, growth and transformation) of international students as they pursue their educational career and goals. ISS also advocates for and supports efforts for advancing internationalization on campus. The unit serves as an interface between the institution and international students and programs in order to facilitate mutual communication, understanding and appreciation, as well as to advocate for the needs and interests of international students and for internationalization at the institution. Internationalization goes beyond simply having international students present on campus and providing a unique set of services to meet their needs. It encompasses aspects such as intercultural programming in which international and domestic students can interact in meaningful ways; curricula and courses that incorporate global perspectives; research that crosses borders; providing opportunities to study abroad; and student, faculty and staff exchange. In essence, it is the process of infusing and integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the purpose and functions of the institution. The ultimate goal of ISS is not only to provide a transformative educational experience for students, but to contribute to a campus environment that enables all students to become globally-minded, interculturally competent citizens through international education programs. Examples of programs provided are:

Onboarding and pre-arrival orientation

Provide onboarding assistance and support to admitted international students by preparing them to enroll at UH Hilo through an online pre-departure orientation and individualized communication prior to students' arrival on campus. This includes but is not limited to selecting & registering for appropriate classes, understanding & complying with health requirements, understanding & selecting health insurance, applying for financial aid & scholarships, applying for & obtaining a visa, finding a place to live, and understanding immigration regulations. It also involves broader and relevant matters such as understanding U.S. & Hawaiian/local cultures and understanding the American higher education system and U.S. classroom culture.

On-site orientation for new international students upon arrival on campus

This on-site orientation not only covers logistical matters, many of which are unique to international students, but is used as an opportunity to begin creating and building a community of learners and leaders as they transition, adjust to and integrate into the campus and larger community.

Pacific Islander Student Center

This dedicated area on campus provides a resource center and space for Pacific Islander students and others to study individually and in groups, hold meetings, socialize and gather and where relevant special events can be held.

Host family program

Through the host family program, international students are matched with a family in the local community. This enables students to not only have a second “family” in Hilo which often serves as a valuable support system, but to learn more about Hilo, Hawai’i, and U.S. and Hawaiian/local culture.

Buddy program

In partnership with the Center for Global Education & Exchange, the buddy program matches international students with domestic students during their first semester at UH Hilo. Students meet informally in social settings and learn about each other’s cultures. Buddies are, for the most part, U.S. citizens – an intentional programmatic design so that students meet and learn from students from other countries and ultimately make lifelong American friends and build bridges among nations.

Support and advising for the International Student Association (ISA)

The ISS director serves as advisor to the International Student Association, a Registered Independent Student Organization (RISO) on campus. This relationship supports the RISO’s efforts to build a strong community of international students and their friends through events and activities. Events and activities include orientation, an annual welcome party for new and continuing international students, and social gatherings, field trips, and recreational activities (e.g., zip lining and other recreational opportunities not offered through the Outdoor EdVenture program). Events are sometimes held on American holidays such as Halloween and Thanksgiving as a way to introduce students to American culture and traditions. These efforts develop leadership skills, build friendships, strengthen support systems, and build and sustain a campus community that values diversity and internationalization.

International topics speaker series

In collaboration with the United Nations USA-Hawaii Island Chapter, ISS organizes a series of talks by UH Hilo faculty and community members throughout the year to expose the campus community to topics and issues of a global nature.

Organizing other special activities

Each year, other special activities around significant events are hosted by the ISS. This includes activities around *International Nights*, *United Nations Day*, *International Conflict Resolution Day*, *International Education Week*, and *International Women’s Day*. These annual events are some of the largest on campus each year and engage hundreds of students as either performers, volunteers and/or attendees. They showcase the diversity of cultures and countries represented on campus, enable students to gain leadership experience, instill cultural pride, and enhance UH Hilo’s cultural and geographic diversity. They engage the campus and local communities and expose them to global issues and different cultures, encourage a global mindset, and assist them with learning about the many cultures and countries represented at UH Hilo.

Global Ambassadors

This program enables international students to volunteer to make presentations at local K-12 schools, as well occasionally on campus, about their cultures and countries. Students reflect on their own cultures and share their perspectives, while helping others learn about other cultures and countries.

Center for Global Education & Exchange

The first priority and fundamental mission of the Center for Global Education and Exchange (CGEE) is to provide an international education element to the UH Hilo collegiate experience to assure that students are successful as future leaders in the global community. This critical mission is advanced by promoting and facilitating exchange opportunities for UH Hilo students and faculty and providing programming and support for international students on the UH Hilo campus. By providing quality study abroad and student exchange choices, as well as programming for and support of international exchange students on our campus, CGEE fosters the development of the students' global perspective and helps develop critical workforce skills such as intercultural communication skills and second-language ability.

Global Engagement Certificate

In partnership with the ISS, the Center for Global Education & Exchange (CGEE) assists students who choose to pursue this academic subject certificate. A unique Student Affairs-Academic Affairs collaborative effort, the Certificate combines academic coursework with a set of required co-curricular and extra-curricular events and activities. The primary intended students are U.S. students who wish to develop a greater awareness of global issues and intercultural competence.

Nā Ala 'Ike Hawai'i

In partnership with the National Student Exchange (NSE), this program immerses UH Hilo exchange students in the unique culture and environment of Hawaii, and guides them through an experience with the power to transform their cultural understanding and sense of place in the world. Through coursework, service and other activities, students strengthen their respect for diversity, deepen their self-awareness and gain greater understanding of the indigenous culture of Hawaii, while offering their own skills and contribution to the land and people of Hawaii.

Collaborative online international education (COIL) initiative

This initiative was introduced to the campus as a method of incorporating global perspectives into the classroom through online partnerships with faculty and students in other countries. This past year, six faculty who have used COIL in their classrooms presented in a campus-wide forum and discussed how collaboration with faculty and students in other countries enriched their curriculum.

Mixed Plate

In partnership with Kipuka and the NSE, this program advances the understanding of Hawaiian culture, history, and language to international students through informal, collaborative events that brings in Native Hawaiian guest speakers and hands-on activities around culture, tradition and food.

Service learning field trips

In partnership the NSE, this program promotes community service learning in an indigenous Hawaiian context to domestic and international students. Through involvement in the field trips, students become aware of the variety of environmental and community service efforts on the island.

Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center initiatives

The Women's Center was established in 1990 with the intention of recruiting and retaining women in the field of higher education. With that goal more than successfully met, women currently account for

64% of the student population at UH Hilo as of 2020. The mission of the Women's Center has now shifted into challenging barriers that inhibit women's inclusion and power within the field of higher education.

The LGBTQ+ Center was later formed into its own entity away from the Women's Center in 2016. The mission of the LGBTQ+ Center at UH Hilo is to promote a stronger, healthier, and equitable environment for the LGBTQ+ community and allies. In 2016, University of Hawaii demonstrated its commitment to promoting equitable LGBTQ+ environments by enacting a "Change of Name/ Preferred Name Request" form distributed from the Registrar's office.

In 2017 the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center operated independently due to a scarce amount of resources and limited visibility to students. These centers were only able to produce one to two events per semester which had little to no participation from students. The events had great intent but the execution was done poorly and did not meet the needs or interests of students. This greatly restricted the engagement of the UH Hilo community in which student employees and volunteers were left to critique and problem solve this low level of involvement.

In 2018, there were increased efforts in programming and collaboration with other departments. With a slightly larger team, the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center were able to implement new programming strategies more efficiently in which there were an average of 10 events per semester and between 40-60 students participating in each event. This increased participation and engagement was done by using intersectionalities across different departments and collaborating with them to share resources and promote events. Through student leadership, they were able to delegate 1-2 students to manage marketing the events through social media, UH calendar, and UH Hilo app. By having students organize and create educational events and workshops, it catered to the actual needs of students and allowed the centers to go above and beyond their bare bones operations. Besides increased programming efforts there was an emphasis on enhancing visibility of the two centers on campus as many people did not know the existence of the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center. In October of 2018 a small tabling event called the Purple Heart Pledge took place to raise awareness about domestic violence and promote campus resources, 57 students joined and took part in this initiative.

Following into 2019, a huge surge of students started visiting the resource center which helped develop consistent office hours and resources for students. The centers created a large shared work area and were able to provide computers, printing, and a safe place for students to work on homework and talk amongst each other. What made this place unique from other study areas such as the libraries was that it provided a safe environment that was free from judgement and people did not have to explain themselves. It was a supportive environment dedicated to LGBTQ+ and other marginalized groups. With increased traffic coming into the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center, the students implemented a tracking system that allowed them to utilize resources more efficiently. This tracking system allowed students to see what days of the week and times the centers were being most used. By having this information, students were able to plan events in the space that would attract the most students. In the fall of 2019 (the semester before the pandemic hit), the Google form indicated 759 check-ins into the Women's/LGBTQ+ Centers shared study area. Additionally, the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center established annual events such as the Clothesline Project and Coming Out Day. In October of 2019, the LGBTQ+ Center's Coming Out Day event reached 93 students which is one of the largest events the centers hosted solely. In total, there were 803 check-ins to the programming events hosted by the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center in the Fall of 2019.

Starting in November 2019, there were a series of meetings where students voiced concerns about losing the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center on campus when campus administration announced an effort to combine the centers as part of a larger initiative to transition to a Center of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In response to these concerns, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Gomes and Director of Equal Opportunity Stotter met with the concerned students to explain the initiative and solicit additional input and feedback. VCSA Gomes continued to meet regularly with students until COVID hit in March 2020, even opening up two meetings to invite other stakeholders, including students from Hawai'i Community College and community members from Hilo Pride. Plans were put on hold during the pandemic with discussions to reconvene in Fall 2021 as more students start to return to campus.

The pandemic also disrupted operations of the centers starting in the Spring 2020 semester when all classes were shifted online. Staff and student leaders in the centers were able to quickly adapt to this change of environment and continue to offer resources. For example, the centers were able to get a supply of menstrual products and distribute them to others on campus who were struggling to get the necessary supplies. The menstrual quarantine kit was a hit and students were able to distribute hundreds of products. Additionally, students put together quarantine kits with puzzles, coloring books, and activities for students to do either in their dorm or at home as everything was very uncertain. Moreover, the Fall 2020 semester was very quiet and had little to no students on campus. The Women's Center and LGBTQ+ decided to expand their traditional scope of mainly focusing on programming and turn to increasing awareness and utilization of community resources. There was a successful collaboration between the Women's Center and Planned Parenthood to secure 5 condom dispensers as well as receiving the Condom Collective Grant to receive 500 condoms to place in these dispensers. These condom dispensers are to be placed around campus to help students feel more comfortable getting contraceptives. Event attendance greatly decreased due to COVID-19 although this did not stop the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center from trying to engage with students.

Lastly, in efforts to improve these centers and increase long lasting sustainability. The division of student affairs assembled an advisory committee to produce recommendations for the Women's Center and LGBTQ+ Center. This advisory committee met a few times a month to discuss the operations of these centers and how they can increase efficiency but most importantly this committee wanted to hear student feedback. To get this feedback, a survey was sent out to students through email and social media in which a handful of students gave back very detailed feedback on ways these centers could change and identify the needs of these resources. After evaluating the results of this survey, the committee used it to help shape the recommendations which were sent to the Vice Chancellor of Students Affairs around the end of the Spring 2021 semester.