The kua (ridgeline) of Ka Hale 'Olelo rises from the tree line announcing Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani and the College of Hawaiian Language. The rolling 'ula roofs feel as if grown from the hills and landforms of Hilo. One can interpret the roofs as hardened (or molten) pāhoehoe, a kinolau of Pelehonuamea.

The roofs of the College will follow the same material and look of the campus, but with a different profile. As future phases grow around Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, the College of Hawaiian Language will have a sense of a campus within a campus.
Once the brush opens up, the full breadth of Ka Haka ʻUla O Keʻelikōlani and the College of Hawaiian Language can be envisioned. The roofs are organic, flowing downhill like a lava flow. One can also see hints of traditional hale, mountains, or the red scarves of Princess Ruth Keʻelikōlani. The steepest part of the roofs, Ka Hale ʻŌlelo (The House of Language, also the name of Princess Ruth’s hale pili at Huliheʻe Palace), rises from the pāhoehoe-like roof, the physical representation of Ka Aoʻo ʻŌlelo, the language element of maoli Hawaiʻi, Hawaiʻi’s cultural identity. At the makai end of the hale is a large bay window that represents the Waha (mouth) and alelo (tongue). The clerestories at the side represent the pepeiao, ears.

Generous glazing along the east and north facades maximizes natural lighting for the administration wing, the library and some of the classrooms. The building also opens up to several courtyards and pā that nearly double the learning spaces. Future phases will also encircle more “outdoor classrooms” and places for contemplation and gathering.
Arriving from the entry driveway, the building nestles into the hillside to minimize its presence. The roofs roll slowly down the hillside like a lava flow. The walkway and ceremonial plaza are on a mauka-makai axis. A line of ʻōhiʻa trees marches downhill, accenting the arrival procession. The future preschool and daycare facilities will share the autocourt. The walkway will wrap around the autocourt, and courtyards will be added to create a cohesive College “campus” within a campus.

The roof of the walkway is lined with photovoltaic panels that will supplement power. In good weather, the lawn in the middle of the autocourt can also be used for classes and gatherings. In fact, as designed, the entire autocourt could be cordoned off, and traffic could still function properly. The autocourt and walkways, at about 11,600sf, would flow into the 3800sf (2600 covered) of ceremonial plaza space, offering a large area for various College and campus events.
The walkway follows the line of ʻōhiʻa trees that marches downhill.

View from parking, along the walkway axis.

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Framed by the tree-like walkway, the arrival signage is a modern interpretation of a pōhaku wall, hopefully made of found pōhaku. Like the college, the stone is progressively transformed from natural ʻilīli at its base to a hewn stone interwoven with other cut stones representing one of the powerful ʻōlelo noʻeau of the college. The top of the sign is capped with a smooth ground pōhaku, representing a higher attainment of naʻauao.

While enhancing the natural beauty of the site, the landscape also plays a role in providing shade from afternoon sun, mitigating glare and heat, and maximizing water retention.

ʻO ka ʻōlelo ke kaʻā o ka mauli
Language is the fiber that binds us to our cultural identity
The walkway and ceremonial plaza are on a mauka-makai axis and guides visitors to the ceremonial plaza.

The future preschool and daycare facilities will share the autocourt. The walkway will be extended and courtyards added to create a cohesive College “campus” within a campus.
The piko skylight is at the center of the covered ceremonial plaza. To the back is Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, ahead is Hilo town and bay. The piko, also pushing through the pāhoehoe-like roof, represents honua kipuka, symbolizing growth and connection with the community and family.

The ceremonial plaza is designed to accommodate formal ceremonies and informal gatherings. It has approximately 50’ x 50’ of covered outdoor space, enough to shelter 200+ people. Another 1200sf of uncovered plaza is also available during good weather. Aligned in a mauka-makai orientation, the plaza not only opens up great vistas, but optimizes natural ventilation.
At the base of the grand stair is Hilo Campus, Hilo town and bay. The stairs, combined with the pa below, makes for a good gathering and processional space. The use of standing seam metal roofs is not only a nod to one of the modern vernacular materials of Hilo; it is also a locally manufactured product, minimizing material travel distances and leveraging local businesses.

The ceremonial plaza doubles as a lookout across Hilo. The stairs are reminiscent of the cascading pahoehoe of the 1881 lava flow that Princess Ruth Ke‘elikōlani helped to avert.
The use of standing seam metal roofs is not only a nod to one of the modern vernacular materials of Hilo; it is also a locally manufactured product, minimizing material travel distances and leveraging local businesses. Another readily available local material, concrete, is widely used in the project. Deep walls, in conjunction with deep overhangs, also help to maximize solar shading, reducing mechanical needs.
Long walls are provided for inspirational art to lift the spirits of kumu and student, and remind all of the mission of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke’elikōlani.

Subtle references are found in the building, like the 5-panel wood doors that are found in Hulihe‘e Palace. Even the scorelines in the concrete pay homage to the lines that were scored into the limestone plaster finish of the palace to imply stone blocks.

Exterior finishes are simple and durable: natural concrete, metal roofing and panels, and low-e glazing. Low maintenance materials, such as carpet squares and low-VOC vinyl tiles, are used throughout the interior to maximize durability and minimize maintenance.
From the auditorium prefunction, one can see Princess Ruth's sculpture garden cascading down to the garden level. Occupants will feel more a part of the environment as the walls of the college disappear. The deep overhangs maximize shading and weather protection, while the large expanses of glazing maximize natural light. This space is large enough to also promote small and informal gatherings.
The auditorium is made of three rooms that can be used individually, or can be joined together. This flexibility gives the college the ability to conduct multiple classes, or gather large groups. Three large supply and storage rooms are provided to tuck away chairs, teaching equipment, etc, to allow for maximum flexibility. The movable partitions are also lined with writeable surfaces to accommodate teachers and students.
Honoring Princess Ruth Keʻelikōlani’s hale pili by Hulihe‘e Palace, the performance hall is filled with multiple kaona. The wood slat ceiling represents the pili of the princess’s hale; the blue background, the night sky. The floating haka lowers and rises over the performance space, symbolizing the various levels of achievement in learning.
The opening to the Waha makes for an implied proscenium for the performance hall. The supply rooms of Ka Hale Ōlelo are immediately adjacent to the performance area, allowing the space to provide storage and impromptu backstage areas for performances. Potentially, one of these rooms could also house future audio/visual and recording equipment.

The clerestories and bay windows of the performance hall are a more subtle gesture, representing the pepeiao and waha of Ka Ao‘ao Ōlelo, the language element of mau‘ili Hawai‘i. The narrow shafts of light travelling through the clerestories in various times of day represent ua ao Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i’s brightness of day, that kipaipai na‘auao, inspires wisdom.
Ka Hale ‘Ōlelo lighting studies

The suspended “chandelier” in Ka Hale ‘Ōlelo has several purposes and kaona. The floating, moving action of the Haka represents the various Haka, or levels of achievement in the College of Hawaiian Language and its curricula. The rack itself is made of 16 ʻōʻō sticks, representing the 16 wā of the Kumulipo, and representing new beginnings. One could also make a reference of the floating ʻōʻō to the now extinct manu ʻōʻō of Hawaiʻi.

Ka Hale ‘Ōlelo’s ceiling has uplit wood slats to let the ceiling float above the performance hall. Lights are mounted on tracks and the haka to help light the performance area. Functionally, the Haka provides additional light for the space, particularly in conference meetings. The Haka also can be lowered, to create a more intimate setting for gatherings.
The Waha's space is large enough to conduct small meetings, or increase seating for a large gathering or performance. Large flanking supply rooms facilitate easy transitioning of functions, and also provides for future growth as needed.

The Waha looks makai out to the campus and Hilo town. The doors will open wide to make the Waha and outdoors feel a part of the performance hall.

The Waha floats above the College's library, emphasizing the connection of 'ōlelo to naʻauao and moʻolelo.
Mele and oli honoring Princess Ruth Ke‘elikōlani will line the walls of the corridors, particularly in the two-story volume of the student stairs.

The light, Ao, cast upon the students, represents the light of knowledge, mālamalama, bestowed upon the student and guest by both teacher and Nature.

The landing of the stairs is large enough to have small gatherings to wala‘au or just relax along the large expansive bay window that looks onto the Hilo campus. The large bay window of the student stair draws natural light into the corridors, reducing artificial lighting requirements.
The corridor along the sculpture garden can be opened up to the garden, facilitating natural ventilation. Like the prefunction above, this space is large enough to promote small and informal gatherings.
The story of Princess Ruth's intervention of a Hilo-bound lava flow is honored in a mural along the ground floor corridor. The plaza also makes for a good setting for works of local artisans.

The plaza is covered by a deep overhang that will help shade the prefunction spaces. Operable windows will help natural ventilation and lower energy needs. Glazing is maximized to draw natural light into the rooms. Large glass doors of the ground floor corridor, faculty and student lounges can be opened up to connect indoor and outdoor spaces.
In good weather, the sloping lawn becomes an amphitheater, the plaza as a stage. The lawn also has plateaus that can foster small gatherings for outdoor classes and individual studying. The lawn also aids in water retention from the large Hilo downpours.

The curved ‘ula-red plaza represents Princess Ruth’s red scarves; the sloping lawn the now grown-over lava flow. The green also represents the kipuka within the pahoehoe, representing the new growth (of life and knowledge) of the College of Hawaiian Language.
This small garden is set aside for faculty and staff. A path and benches will provide a place for meditation and small informal meetings. The garden also helps to bring natural light and ventilation deep into the building, drawing views of nature into the work spaces.

With luck, the new gardens will attract Hawaii’s other natives. Their voices (and mana'o) can be added to those of the College.
The building reaches out to the campus and nature, in the form of the lānai classroom, the student entry, and the Waha.

The large bay window of the student stair draws natural light into the corridors. The light, Ao, casting upon the students, represents the light of knowledge, mālamalama, bestowed upon the student and guest by both teacher and Nature. Mele and oli honoring Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani will line the walls of the corridors, particularly in the two-story volume of the student stairs.

The new landscape aligns with the stories of the land and the mission of the College. Native plants at the immediate perimeter support programs like the lānai classroom and its interactive outdoor curricula. Future phases will grow out from Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, and along with future courtyards and landscape, enlarge the kipuka of the College of Hawaiian Language.