

CASE STUDY

Culture, Land, and Reciprocity: A New Green Learning Agenda in Hawai'i

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Caption: Kōkua Kalihi Valley Ho'oulu 'Āina. Photo credit: Crivir Ivee Cruz

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About the New Green Learning Agenda Project

As we find ourselves in a kaleidoscope of efforts, strategies, and actors in pursuit of results-oriented approaches to tackling the climate crisis and achieving a just transition, we are alarmed by the inadequate attention to the education and training required to support meaningful and sustainable actions in the short-term and to seed deep systemic transformation in the long-term.

This project aims to address this gap by organizing the richness of perspectives not always invited to green economy decisionmaking tables. In doing so, this project aims to empower the actors in the education and training ecosystem to identify actions toward building a New Green Learning Agenda. This agenda will serve as a vision for education and training in a climate-impacted world that ensures the transition to the green economy is inclusive, diverse, and just, centering the needs and experiences of environmental justice communities and climate vulnerable populations around the globe. This report is the second report of two.

The first report, *Education and Training: An Opportunity to Achieve a Just Transition to a Low-Carbon, Socially Inclusive Economy*, illuminates the extent and scope of postsecondary education and training investments needed to achieve a just transition in the U.S. The report maps the landscape of green jobs, green skills, and green learning opportunities with an eye toward understanding how gaps in these landscapes intersect with issues of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The report also provides recommendations to postsecondary institution leaders and education decisionmakers to direct future U.S. climate policy attention toward more transformative investments in education and training.

This second report is the byproduct of a collaboration between Unbounded Associates and place-based research partners in Hawai'i, Chicago, and Kentucky. Together, we explore community-driven approaches to closing green learning opportunity gaps from a variety of voices across three case studies: from community-based organizations to workforce training program alumni and from faculty and administrative staff of postsecondary institutions to students of community and technical colleges. This report synthesizes insights from these actors and cases on the paradigm shift required among postsecondary institutions to unlock their potential as both community-based actors and community-serving actors. The report also offers a set of recommendations for postsecondary institutions to co-define with community-based organizations a New Green Learning Agenda that can enable a just transition that serves the needs of historically marginalized populations in their surrounding communities.



Introduction

Hawai'i is home to many cultural and ethnic groups, each of whom has contributed to its rich culture, history, and socioeconomic fabric over time. For this case study, the people of Hawai'i include the indigenous Native Hawaiians and residents of other nationalities and ethnicities who now call this place home.

Hawai'i has a special historical context, culture, and sense of place that separates it from the continental United States (US). The Hawaiian Islands are an archipelago, a chain of islands, eight of which are inhabited. Although Hawai'i shares similar climate change and environmental challenges with Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific, such as coastal erosion and sea level rise, scarcity of freshwater and saltwater intrusion, loss of biodiversity, and more, Hawai'i is not classified economically or politically as a SIDS.

Culturally and ethnically, Hawai'i is part of Oceania, the expansive region of the Pacific Ocean comprising four subregions (Australasia, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia—the latter of which Hawai'i is located within). Hawai'i shares similar historical experiences to other Pacific islands with Western explorers, missionaries, and colonizers leading to the eventual suppression of its indigenous language, culture, and practices, including land and agricultural practices. In their place came a host of new institutions (including educational), new food crops, animals, and diseases, which eventually led to dramatic changes in the physical terrain, demographics, knowledge systems, and more.

Over the past 40 years, Hawai'i has experienced a revival in re-learning indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices to better understand and address societal issues of the present and future. This movement has created a transformational shift in local mindsets, behaviors, and practices toward the environment. As an example, the restoration of Native Hawaiian fishponds, which are traditional aquaculture systems designed to raise and harvest a sustainable fish supply for coastal communities. There has also been the revitalization of the Native Hawaiian

language through immersion and charter schools in addition to various nonformal education programs.

As the impacts of climate change intensify in Oceania and beyond, educational institutions in Hawai'i, especially at the postsecondary level, can play an important role in ensuring present and future generations have a fighting chance to address these issues. To ensure that this role for postsecondary institutions (PSIs) is culturally responsive and empowering, this case study presents key themes such as *aloha 'āina* (love of land), cultural reciprocity, and the value and power of partnerships, especially with community-based organizations (CBOs), and how these three components can help inform a New Green Learning Agenda (NGLA) in Hawai'i that achieves a just transition rooted in indigenous knowledge and Hawaiian cultural logics. This case study draws from the wisdom and insights of 16 participants affiliated with PSIs on the island of Oahu, Hawai'i.



Key Messages and Findings

Actors, Pathways, and Barriers to Green Learning in Hawai'i

Actors relevant to Hawai'i's just transition education and training ecosystem include academics and educators, policymakers and advocates, members of the for-profit sector (such as business owners, social entrepreneurs, and impact investors), philanthropists, do-gooders, grassroots organizations, nonprofits and CBOs, community members, leaders and champions, cultural practitioners and experts, peers, mentors, as well as several state government and federal agencies established to mitigate climate change, for example, the Climate Change Commission of the City and County of Honolulu's Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency. The list is vast, the categories are plenty, and the people are the same—in purpose, mission, and heart. Important to this ecosystem is yet another set of unique stakeholders: *kūpuna* (the “elderly” population), the respected holders of ancestral knowledge and wisdom, and *keiki* or *kamali'i* (children and youth), the courageous voices of today who are shaping the future of tomorrow.

This ecosystem of actors includes both a consistent string of names who are well-known locally and respected in their field of work, study, and influence, as well as leaders, behind-the-scenes actors, and others who are not typically associated with green learning or climate change but who are nonetheless critical to implementing sustainability in these islands. Each of these actors possesses a wide variety of skill sets, experiences, and work history in their professional and personal spheres that constitute the green learning space in Hawai'i. They also wear multiple hats and play multiple roles in groups that overlap to some degree (for example, one person may be the cultural liaison in a CBO while working full-time for a university). Thus, when sharing their experiences, the actors that we spoke to—the participants in this case study—brought with them valuable and unique insights into sustainability, green learning, and climate change, as well as a common orientation of being rooted in culture and 'aina-based learning (more on this, below).

The pathways these actors followed to becoming advocates for sustainability and green learning are varied—some by choice, others by chance, and still others because of environmental injustices committed against their communities. Some participants had to forge their own paths because the traditional route from education to employment in sustainability fields does not provide an obvious or financially viable pathway for all, especially for women, people of color, and those from underrepresented marginalized communities. As noted by one of our participants, the Pacific Islands are no strangers to the world of climate change. Indigenous people in Hawai'i and across Oceania contribute the least to climate change but are among the first on the planet to feel its impact. In addition, the environmental injustices they have encountered to date have led them to have to fight for the protection of sacred land being used for commercial purposes and advocate for water rights and livable wages. These realities are coupled with their lack of access to affordable educational opportunities that provide recognized professional development certifications in climate change and sustainability, thus resulting in higher-paying jobs in the green workforce in Hawai'i being given to job seekers from outside of Hawai'i, despite the green skills and indigenous knowledge they have learned through experience and elsewhere.

For others in this ecosystem of actors, the path was rather serendipitous. This can be illustrated by the examples of two librarians working at separate campuses in the University of Hawai'i (UH) system. Their pathways to their current positions in the just transition education and training ecosystem also give light on just how broad and wide these issues are. Sustainability and green learning are not just the purview of those who work directly on climate change or environmental issues. These issues affect everybody, and a New Green Learning Agenda should empower everyone to take action.

The Tale of Two Librarians

One of our interviewees is a librarian who was born

and raised in the Philippines. She shared that she considers herself a “community educator,” a “bridge for community and academia.” Her family background and educational training geared her toward a career as a biologist. What she realized over time during her work and educational experiences was that “biology was destructive and did not make sense to her as a woman of color,” which she perceived was a real problem with science and Western education overall. She did not agree with how she was being taught about certain topics nor did she believe that “putting things into boxes” made sense. In her career journey towards her current role, she gained a deeper understanding of just how interconnected things are, such as “culture, environment, and biology,” and that there should be “newer standards” in incorporating culture and science in mainstream curriculum development. Overall, she believes Hawai‘i does a very good job of linking culture, science, and the environment, especially with the rise of intentional green learning opportunities for learners from preschool to postsecondary education.

In contrast, another librarian from a community college recalls that she was “thrown into” the sustainability world early in her librarian career. She asked the vice chancellor (VC) at the time a simple question, prompted by some of the students who noticed the lack of sustainable practices on the campus: “Hey, what’s the deal with recycling?” She received an unexpected response from the VC at the time: “Congratulations, you are now a part of the Sustainability Committee.” She shared that although she did not have any formal background in sustainability education and training, nor conventional sustainability-related disciplines such as agriculture, horticulture, biology, or ecology, she now plays a pivotal role on campus as a “cheerleader for sustainability initiatives and activities.” She has been the chair of the community college’s sustainability committee for almost 8 years now, a working group of faculty, staff, and students, which has grown and made impactful strides in greening the campus and creating more green learning pathways for climate change and conservation stewardship activities since 2012. Although this librarian thinks she is “not the most innovative, creative, knowledgeable sustainability professional by a mile,” she is “good at banding people together” and “really proud of this group and the kinds of things that they have done over the years.”

Although perhaps they may not be aware of it, individuals like these two librarians—individuals who are not in leadership positions, nor who are expected to be working on these issues—have played a major role in shaping a “New Green Learning Agenda” in

the University of Hawai‘i system. These champions are individuals who have adjusted their ways of thinking and approaches to work by infusing local sustainability concepts and personal experiences into their pedagogies and educational activities—such as creating more ‘aina-based service projects that would help serve community purposes. Oftentimes, these “champions become cheerleaders” for the broader campus-wide sustainability mission and faculty end up doing this work as a form of “service.”¹² And although these sustainability enthusiasts often initiate climate change awareness campaigns and sustainability activities that are specific to their programs and student population on their campuses, these individuals have become a driving force in various efforts to unite university campuses across the Hawai‘i system in adopting green learning. To advance sustainability goals on a collective scale, these sustainability champions and cheerleaders have become a part (informally and formally) of a larger UH system-wide network called the UH Office of Sustainability (UHOS), which promotes and integrates sustainability policies and practices across the various campuses through research, operations, cultural connections, community engagement opportunities, and educational programs. Four of our case study participants knew of each other because of their affiliation within this systemwide network.

Cultural Components as Green Learning Content

Hawai‘i has a rich culture and history—one that is filled with stories tied to the land (‘aina) and people (kanaka) that not only provide lessons in sustainable reciprocal living for future generations but also hold historical relevance to understanding how Hawai‘i’s cultural history informs a local approach to a just transition for Hawai‘i today. The following examples of cultural components that case study participants have illuminated hold great relevance to, and cannot be separated from, a local approach to green learning.

‘Aina-based Learning

Hawai‘i’s culture is strongly tied to the ‘aina (land) and the concept of green learning must be understood as grounded in the interconnection between ‘aina and people. This gets translated into practice as ‘aina-based (land-based) learning—place-based learning where learners are allowed to practice sustainability through hands-on science, culture, art, politics, and, most importantly, through the eyes and lenses of those who lived on the land before.

The majority, if not all of the participants we spoke with, referred to coexistence between the land and its people and how green learning must be anchored in and guided by this reciprocal relationship of care. An example is the traditional land division of *ahupuaʻa*, which provides a model of living in precolonial Hawaiʻi where land and its resources were stewarded for the benefit of present and future generations. An *ahupuaʻa* is a large pie-slice-shaped subdivision of land from the top of a mountain down to the shore and holds historical, socioeconomic, geologic, and climatic value in which people treated their resources in a way that was sustainable to them and their environment.

Embedded within the *ahupuaʻa* as a model of *ʻaina*-based learning is a fundamental cultural belief that *if you take care of the land, the land will take care of you*. For example, it is the people's *kuleana* (responsibility and privilege) to take care of the land and its resources so that it may continue to thrive and provide sustenance for current and future generations. In the context of green learning and the advancement of a just transition, such *ʻaina*-based learning encourages the adoption of a more socially responsible attitude towards protecting and restoring one's natural resources, and enables a more caring approach to ensuring these resources are there for future generations. In other words, the conditions and state of the social, natural, and physical environment are dependent on how people care for and treat each other.

The Transfer of Indigenous Knowledge

Just as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island cultures play a key role in shaping the notion of green learning in Hawaiʻi, the generational transfer of indigenous wisdom and ancestral knowledge of how to care for and sustain natural resources through *moʻolelo* (stories), provides further insight into how lessons of the past can be used to take care of the future.

In particular, this practice of knowledge sharing is as much about who is sharing as it is about how and why traditional knowledge is passed on to certain individuals. Some cultural practitioners and community/family leaders are the bearers, vessels, and holders of traditional knowledge. Those who are privileged to be taught Native Hawaiian values, concepts, and practices, are expected to apply them in daily living, and it may or may not be the receiver's *kuleana* (right or responsibility) to share these values, concepts, and practices with others. Often the permission to share and apply this knowledge is based on one's identity and positionality—who you are, who gave you this knowledge

and why, and how you received this knowledge—as well as the intention behind the act of teaching.

The approach to green learning is as important as the content of green learning. For example, there is the concept of *hoʻoponopono*, a Hawaiian practice to “make things right” in a culturally appropriate and accepted way. This ancient Hawaiian practice is a process of making things right in one's relationships, including the relationships one has with one's ancestors, the earth's resources, and especially with oneself. How one handles and manages these relationships in life matters. Because Native Hawaiian knowledge and culture were almost lost, it matters what is being taught and by whom to re-learn this knowledge.

The considerations above help provide some insight into the landscape of cultural assets and cultural nuances which would aid in defining an NGLA in Hawaiʻi. How these cultural components are understood and who needs to be involved to shape the role of PSIs in facilitating a more sustainable and just economy in Hawaiʻi deserves greater exploration. The thoughts, insights, and sentiments shared by our study participants provide a glimpse of how existing efforts and attempts to move toward a greener and more caring economy could be built on the values and cultural tenets of those who have stewarded resources in Hawaiʻi for past generations.

Formalizing Green Learning & Sustainability Education

When it comes to defining approaches to quality education for climate awareness and action, PSIs in Hawaiʻi have started to develop and implement formalized structures to deliver green learning opportunities. Among these are the UH system's sustainability degrees and S-Designation, and Hawaiʻi Pacific University's (HPU) sustainability degree programs. Both approaches aspire to develop a green mindset in the learner, build a breadth of green skills, and target systems transformation in a way that is aligned with the cultural logics of local and indigenous approaches to sustainability as discussed above. The formalization of both approaches within the PSI academic structures and processes serves to create value, status, and certifications around the knowledge, skills, and practices that such green learning enables, especially within the Western context. One approach leaves it up to faculty and students to self-select into these courses, degrees, and programs (UH), while the other approach integrates sustainability

into their general education requirements (HPU). This means that green learning opportunities in the latter are exposed to all undergraduate students as part of their required learning, whereas green learning opportunities in the former appear to be limited to specific spaces in these institutions depending on the student's chosen area of study.

University of Hawai'i: Sustainability Degrees and the S-Designation

The University of Hawai'i recognizes the need for inter- and trans-disciplinary curricula that prepare a new generation for productive futures in the face of accelerating future trends. Future career pathways include sustainability professionals, resiliency officers, socioecological restoration practitioners, change agents to transform legacy systems, and perhaps even careers in fields that do not yet exist. In addition, students can obtain a degree in sustainability through these new degree programs designed around teaching sustainability as a discipline to prepare students to become change agents equipped with competencies which empower them to work towards transformation of the socioecological systems upon which our societies depend"

University of Hawai'i website

In the UH system, there are three formal "sustainability" degree programs held at the following campuses: (1) the UH Mānoa's Bachelor of Arts in Sustainability Studies, (2) UH Maui College's Bachelor of Applied Science in Sustainable Science Management, and (3) UH West Oahu's Bachelor of Applied Science in Sustainable Community Food Systems. According to the [University of Hawai'i Website](#): "The courses required for the successful completion of these programs educate students about how different dimensions of sustainability relate to and support each other in theory and practice. Sustainability degree programs are interdisciplinary and teach sustainability as an integrated concept, including its cultural, social, economic, and environmental dimensions." In addition to the three specific degree programs, each of the 10-campus that comprise the UH system (3 universities, 7 community colleges), has offerings on several sustainability topics integrated into their curricula (including General Education courses) across multiple disciplines at the BA, MA, and PhD level. These courses vary in nature and are usually specific to each campus.

A few of our UH case study participants are involved in teaching and conducting research across multiple disciplines. In doing so, they shared having to undergo a lengthy S-Designation approval process (a UH-wide strategic process) to have courses recognized with a sustainability focus, especially if the course is in a different type of discipline that does not fall under the natural sciences. For the S-Designation to be given, the faculty member has to apply every 2 years for renewal and must reflect on how their syllabus and course schedule appropriately integrates sustainability topics and practices in their curriculum and training. One of our participants uses the S-Designation in the introductory Pacific Island Studies and Hawaiian Studies courses he teaches. Although the process is a tedious one, he shared that it is very valuable and necessary as it validated the support he receives from the university, his professional peers, and the community members he works with. The S-Designation makes it "more official" and also gives his courses "power" into his content, such as the power of credibility, recognition, relevance, value, and authenticity. This "power" seemingly also enables conditions to broaden his network and increase the number of students who enroll in his courses, strengthen his teaching practices, and further deepen his impact within the community, especially through his relationships with respected cultural practitioners/leaders.

Interestingly, in contrast to the sentiments expressed above, regarding the development of the S-Designation in UH's institutional history, one participant shared that it "was a grassroots effort that emphasized faculty-driven and peer-to-peer conversation about courses emphasizing sustainability" and not meant to be a "lengthy process" with "bureaucratic requirements." Furthermore, as described in the curriculum handbook, the S-Designation was meant to serve as an "opt-in" process that had a 'talk story intake' with faculty peers, to encourage interdisciplinary faculty dialogue." The S-Designation was developed to challenge the university and address the following question: "What is sustainability in your discipline, or course?" The initiative "was the expression of a grassroots, ground-up, transformation of courses across every discipline" and "preceded the Executive Policy 4.202 Systemwide." The participant further elaborated, "It was the statewide sustainability summits (UH System, and also including Chaminate and Hawai'i Pacific University) that created EP 4.202 through a lengthy, extremely tedious process of input from hundreds of stakeholders."

In addition to the S-Designation, there are many other activities and initiatives the UH schools engage in that foster specific capacities for skills that are geared towards green jobs and just transitions (innovation, technology, environment management, analytical, data-driven, research, development, research), as well as soft “green” life skills that can be applied across any fields of study (such as empathy, open-mindedness, adaptiveness, collaborative thinking, leadership, resilience). UH campuses also allow for and encourage students to actively design and drive their own sustainability initiatives by providing various structures of support: accelerator and entrepreneurship programs, seed funding, technical assistance, coaching, and more.

Hawai'i Pacific University (HPU) and The Natural + Sustainable World

In contrast to the UH System’s S-Designation of sustainability courses and the systemwide strategic attempt to integrate these courses in an interdisciplinary fashion, the HPU has specific certificate and degree programs at both the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels tailored towards environmental and sustainability type fields. Their approach is different in that they do not have a broader university-wide effort to incentivize other courses with a “sustainability emphasis,” but rather offer the following options as potential fields of study for each level (Table 1).

One participant shared that in addition to these



Caption: Ho’okua’āina, Lo’i kalo in Kailua, located in the ahupua’a of Kailua at Kapalai in Maunawili on the island of O’ahu, Hawai’i. Photo credit: LorMona Meredith

sustainability and environment-focused programs, students enrolled in the undergraduate general education courses are *required* to take one course offering in the following curriculum areas as part of their first-year common core competencies: The American Experience, Creative Arts, Critical Thinking and Expression, Global Crossroads and Diversity, The Natural World, The Sustainable World, Technology and Innovation, and lastly, Traditions and Movements that Shape the World. Out of the eight available options on this list of offerings for first-year common core competencies, there are two related to sustainability—*The Natural World* and *The Sustainable World*. This can be seen as HPU’s attempt to make sustainability a foundational piece of the student’s undergraduate education experience that would help give them some basic understanding of green learning concepts and skills before advancing to higher-level graduate degrees. However, it should also be noted that out of the long list of eight first-year options, there are only two sustainability-related courses, which means the student’s probability of going into the sustainability field and green learning space is significantly lower.

About 6 years ago one of our participants, who is a social work instructor at HPU, was approached to teach undergraduate courses in social work—with a notable sustainability focus. This was this instructor’s first time getting into the topic of sustainability and was admittedly a big learning curve for him. He went to work right away, did extensive research in reading about the topic, and engaged in conversations with his colleagues and other experts in the field. Since then, he’s been teaching it every semester. He believed the university leadership and faculty had great foresight in strategically building the sustainability aspects of learning as part of the general education required core competency courses for first-year social work students. Every incoming freshman had to take a course in sustainability, the natural world, and the other focus areas listed above, whether they liked it or not. It was an intentional approach to expand the student’s worldview, expose them to interdisciplinary and experiential ways of learning, and also instill core values in these new students for long-term success: to become knowledgeable about social economic, and environmental issues such as environmental justice, climate change, sustainability, critical thinking, natural resource environmental stewardship and more.

In the instructor’s undergraduate Social Work & Sustainability course, he has the students design and undertake a project that touches on the social, economic, and environmental aspects of an issue; then, has them develop an action plan that incorporates

classroom learning into real-life applications. He also encourages the students to identify and work with an agency or community group that addresses this issue, as well as tie in their projects into meeting one or more of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An example of a student-developed project that he proudly shared was one on the issue of food waste in Hawai'i. His students wanted to raise awareness of finding more sustainable ways to use food waste within the tourism and hospitality industry, specifically with large restaurants. The students partnered with nonprofit organizations to learn how to deal with food waste and went to work in the *lo'i* (taro patch) and *loko 'ia* (fishpond) to get hands-on experiences for farm-to-table and fish-to-table sustainable practices, which they later shared with the restaurants they were involved with. They also worked closely with grassroots organizations that other study participants mentioned in their partnerships as well, such as *Papahana Kuaola* and *Ma'o Farms*.

Cultural Reciprocity and PSI Systems

A key finding in this case study is this notion of "cultural reciprocity" and its value in the PSI systems, which involves recognizing and valuing the contributions of others engaging in a reciprocal learning process. In general, there is almost a natural reciprocity in the way green learning and sustainability concepts are being taught and practiced in Hawai'i. In particular, this reciprocity is shown by the respectful and equitable exchange of knowledge, traditions, and practices between indigenous people and communities in this space. This exchange has natural or assumed expectations in everyday interactions in nonformal settings, which often promotes cooperation, trust, loyalty, and unity amongst individuals and groups. There is incredible value in reciprocal relationships and how these actors nurture, strengthen, and maintain their networks.

There is also cultural reciprocity in the communities that offer "spaces" for green learning and sustainability

concepts to be applied when university instructors create and expose their students to these community spaces. However, it appears that there is no formal recognition and/or additional compensation for the extra time and resources faculty spend in offering these unique learning opportunities to their students. For example, one of our non-Native Hawaiian study participants observed that it takes "a lot more time and effort to take your class to the *lo'i* (fishpond) than to deliver a PowerPoint" and that "there's a lot more relationship-building to create the places to meet with cultural practitioners. Cultural work requires gift-giving and meal-sharing. Gifts take time. Food costs money. None of that is compensated, rewarded, or even acknowledged. Faculty spend their own money and their weekends to make this happen. Reciprocity is not at all convenient to any kind of reimbursement report or program budget." As an "outsider" who has observed this long-time occurrence, this participant recognizes the significance of this cultural work, the number of hours, and amount of work it takes to provide this type of community-driven training in a higher education system. They also recognize its impact on the time, energy, and resources of the faculty who deliver it (mostly exemplary Native Hawaiians who go above and beyond).

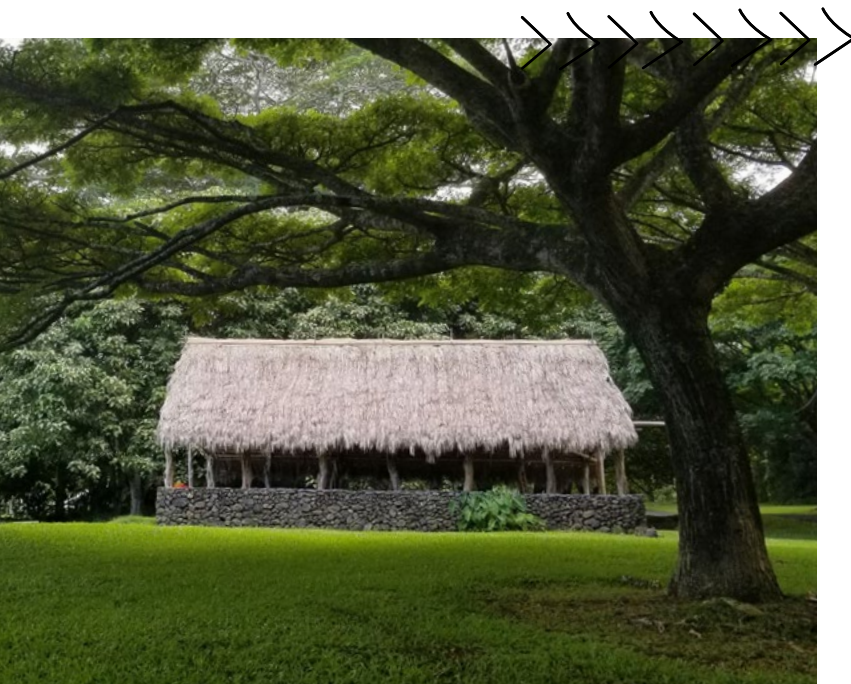
In addition to this, this participant also recognizes there are genealogies related to these places in which 'aina-based learning is being taught. The participant further illustrates in this example when "a person who wants to do research, or a class project, or anything that might be a really great thing, needs to be in a relationship" with "the people with genealogies to the place. There's a different timeline. It's not always convenient to the class schedule or the semester timeline."

The Value of 'Aina-Based Learning in CBOs

As mentioned earlier, most of the interviewees wear multiple hats, not only working in a professional capacity within a PSI, but also being involved with a variety of nonprofit and community-based organizations and initiatives, especially those that

Table 2. HPU Certificate and Degree Program

GRADUATE/PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES	BACHELOR DEGREE PROGRAMS	MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Leadership & Sustainability Development Environment, Policy & Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master of Arts in Sustainability



Caption: Hale in Ala Kukui Cultural Retreat Center, Hana, Island of Maui, Hawai'i. Photo credit: LorMona Meredith

promote and provide 'aina-based learning and experiential learning opportunities, either through partnership work, part of their leadership board, or through volunteer and advocacy support work.

Most of these partnerships stemmed directly from the individual's direct relationship (either personal or professional) with a community member, and provided a way for the PSI to engage with the grassroots entities at the local level, thus creating opportunities for students to participate in hands-on learning and skills development activities that were both meaningful and transformational. For instance, a few of the college instructors had solid relationships with notable organizations which afforded their students direct access to internship and practicum opportunities, while in turn also giving community service and benefits back to the natural environment. These included natural farming, learning about agriculture sustainably, engaging in community work days in the fishpond, and more.

The CBOs are usually more inclined to engage university students in their programming and service-learning if they had a direct relationship with their faculty instructor/coordinator, one that was built on trust and reciprocity. Making and building relationships this way is usually much more effective in this space if it was initiated by someone who is familiar with and has a great rapport with the CBO. The students were also encouraged to forge their own way of identifying other CBOs they were interested in working with that were

outside of the options provided. In these cases, they would be encouraged to identify potential connections the CBO had within the faculty and community that would help make this relationship possible.

One widely known organization in Hawai'i that has been highly successful in making a deep impact in aligning green learning and service-learning opportunities through collaboration across all sectors is Kupu. As a relatively young organization (established in 2007), Kupu has done a marvelous job in developing partnerships with PSIs, CBOs, businesses, and a variety of other local and nationwide initiatives. Kupu is a nonprofit organization aimed at empowering youth to build character, leadership capacity, and environmental stewardship mindset through service-learning opportunities. Since its inception, they have partnered with over 100 local schools, colleges, nonprofit, and profit organizations, community networks, and social enterprises.

Kupu's impressive partnership list continues to grow as its reach expands and deepens with its innovative environmental training programs. Kupu's organizational values are reflected in the CHOSEN acronym, which stands for Character, Humility, 'Ohana, Service, Excellence, and Nobility. These values appear to be integrated into their recruitment strategies, operations, services, and programming. Compared to other organizations, perhaps the significant difference here is that Kupu has made successful strides in the process of how they built their partnerships with postsecondary institutions and other organizations, established the foundation of these collaborative relationships with mutual respect, and grounded them in trust and integrity. Through its programs, Kupu *"works in intermediate and high schools to provide work-based and 'aina-based learning directly to students; provides out-of-school opportunities for 6-12th graders; offers professional development to educators; and works in partnership to provide strategic support at the school, district, and DOE-level"* (Kupu Website). Kupu continues to leverage opportunities in the community for systemic transformation, while at the same time providing community benefits, which includes developing and empowering a locally grown green workforce through their youth and young adult participants.

For example, Kupu recently launched their Natural Resource Sector Partnership (NRSP) led by their Environmental Education Department (EED), which, according to one of our study participants, is a collaboration platform to convene together

Hawai'i's educators as well as people who work in and support the natural resources management and conservation fields. The purpose of this group is to discuss and address systemic issues in natural resource management, particularly the lack of green job development opportunities in Hawai'i, and provide creative innovative solutions that work.

The overarching goal of the NRSP collaborative partnership is to develop a homegrown natural resources workforce to prevent the recurring "brain drain" phenomenon (where people leave Hawai'i to gain green skills education and work skills elsewhere and end up living in those places outside of Hawai'i). The group is fairly new, but the goal is not, and perhaps through this coordinated ambitious effort there can be more of a realization of creating a just economy and a more "green-skilled" local workforce that would be better equipped to handle climate change and environmental issues in the Hawai'i of today.

In summary, the process of building partnerships with PSIs and CBOs is important (whether formal or informal) as it is a key driver of enabling an NGLA in Hawai'i. Through the specific examples given, we understand that: (1) PSI faculty members engage in informal and formal partnerships with CBOs to support community-driven initiatives while at the same time giving students meaningful service-learning opportunities that expand on their green training/training in the classrooms, and (2) nonprofit organizations and CBOs (such as Kupu) can provide alternative pathways to service learning opportunities that are sometimes not available to students through their PSIs, especially if their faculty/instructor does not have direct relationships with the community involved.

Power: Who Has It and What Impact Does It Have on the Implementation of an NGLA?

Inherent in the way that green learning takes shape at the postsecondary level in Hawai'i is the dynamic giving and taking of *power*. The imbalances of power underlie the tensions within the green learning ecosystem amongst all actors—between the PSIs and CBOs and even within the PSIs themselves. Whereas power is rooted in *aloha 'aina* (love for the land), *aloha*, and service appear to empower a green learning agenda that is regenerative, sustainable, and nourishing. While a struggle *for* power and struggle *with* power is inevitable, our participants highlight the importance of being aware of the existence of power and its impact within the world of climate change, sustainability,

and green learning. It would be wise to recognize the influence of power and how it plays in enabling an NGLA, through power imbalance or power abundance.

Imbalances of power as shared by our participants in this study were experienced either personally through their work or the system within their workspaces. For example, this can be seen through the examples of the UH participant seeking power validation for his courses through the S-Designation, or via the HPU social work instructor's power given to him through assignment by his leadership to redesign his course with a sustainability focus. It can also be seen in the tale of the two librarians, where they shared respectively that they felt empowered to lead a sustainability initiative when they were tasked with a project by their campus leadership. In these examples, we notice that power is significant in making things happen by giving permission to act and do, leading and supporting sustainability initiatives, recognizing and validating courses taught within the green learning fields, and building rapport and relationships, especially when working with communities.

Our participants also observed the limits of their own power, in their ability to influence others and influence outcomes within their programs. For example, some of our UH-affiliated participants recognize the power that institutional systems have on faculty, and how this power can shift from one group of actors to the next. For example, as in the case of the S-Designation initiative, when it was initially established by the faculty at a grass-roots level, it was a strategy to foster open dialogue and collaboration across disciplines and campuses, giving faculty the power over the decisionmaking process on how their sustainability courses were implemented. Now that the S-Designation initiative has been adopted as part of the institution's executive policy, it appears that power has shifted from this faculty group to the institution, making faculty members work extra steps to get their courses recognized with a sustainability focus after going through a tedious approval process.

Yet, the power was not always discussed as an imbalance between entities (between people or institutions) but as something in abundance and rooted in *aina*, *aloha*, and service to others.

For example, one of our university participants described that her role as a "Hawaiian Epistemologist" is to "indigenize the university". She sees sustainability as an area of study in her life—an idea that has "*always been about love of land*" and "*serve people*."

She mentions her work in philosophy as “specifically indigenous epistemology,” which is about healing that can happen “between knowledge and service to land.” In her own words, “to summarize Hawaiian epistemology, it’s to love land, serve people. And I think the concept of sustainability is that simultaneously to love lands with people. And it’s a hologram because it is actually also to serve land, love people.” From this concept, we learn that by living the principle of aloha and aloha ‘aina (love for the land), we can calibrate these power imbalances for ourselves and our communities. This is about giving our own people the power to liberate themselves, through this knowledge of aloha (love) and service. This power is energized and sourced by this very simple concept in Hawaiian epistemology: to love land and serve people.



Caption: Aloha circle at Kōkua Kalihi Valley Ho‘oulu ‘Āina mālama ‘āina community work day. Photo credit: Crivir Ivey Cruz

Recommendations

This case study offers many insights into how local green learning actors attempt to align green learning with opportunities that include leveraging systems, structures, and partnerships to build a framework that contributes to systems transformation. For example, with HPU, the university leadership strategically planned to include green learning and green skills development in their core program offerings by making it a requirement in their general education courses. In other cases, local actors leveraged current systems of formal and informal relationships and networks within communities to advance green learning opportunities that translate into locally relevant green workforce opportunities that serve community needs, such as when the college instructors partnered with CBOs to provide *‘aina*-based learning activities and when Kupu launched their Natural Resource Partnership initiative. These types of strategic moves provide green learning stakeholders with opportunities to create, enable and sustain just transitions—where people are empowered to live, learn, work, and thrive in the places and spaces they grew up in while ensuring these places are available and can sustain future generations with the same, if not better, quality of life.

We only began to touch the tip of the iceberg in terms of gathering insights from education and community leaders that could inform a New Green Learning Agenda for the Hawaiian islands. Many community voices that are central to this conversation were not included in this initial study due to time constraints and limitations in capacity. There is a lot more to unpack, and we hope that these initial findings can give light on what is currently happening and be a valuable source in our efforts to deepen and broaden our understanding of a New Green Learning Agenda in Hawai‘i.

What surfaced at this moment in time are the following recommendations to aid postsecondary institutions in Hawai‘i to co-define an NGLA that is rooted in local understandings, promotes the diverse unique cultural assets of Hawai‘i, and addresses longstanding power imbalances for a more just island future:

1. **Harness the value, power, and strength of community-based organizations across the Hawaiian islands:**
 - a. Target outreach to respected community leaders across disciplines, organizations, and fields through appropriate culturally informed ways.
 - b. Invite and include additional voices across the other islands of Hawai‘i to integrate varied perspectives and unique island contexts.
 - c. Develop a robust map of organizations that currently do this work in Hawai‘i and research what they do and provide ideas of entryway for NGLA to advance/support ongoing work, rather than reinvent the wheel. Leverage existing synergies and fill the gaps to avoid redundancies and maximize partnership opportunities.
 - d. Identify and create strategic pathways that place the community at the forefront of the relationship when building partnerships—doing so creates and retains trust for a more positive and long-lasting deep relationship.
2. **Expand on existing initiatives and invest more resources in community colleges:**
 - a. Providing more access to resources to help to build capacity and infrastructure.
 - b. Creating and implementing innovative relevant programs through partnerships with CBOs that not only address climate change and environmental issues in their learning outcomes but also are specifically developed for the people who live and work in Hawai‘i.
 - c. Increasing vocational training opportunities and strengthening pipelines for the community college sustainability programs into university and the professional sectors.

- 1. Create, utilize, leverage, and maximize strong partnership and collaborative action to develop the following tools and opportunities:**
 - a. Use a comprehensive data and metric system that explores green learning and green skills development across various PSIs in Hawai'i, like Unbounded Associates Green Learning Opportunities Database.
 - b. Explore other innovative ways to engage with the for-profit sector (specifically businesses in the tourism and hospitality industry for example) and partner with the emerging "fourth" sector, those unique but impactful for-benefit enterprises that are mission- and purpose-driven, which incorporate private sector approaches with social and environmental benefits typical of public and nonprofit organizations. This would include sustainable for-profit businesses, faith-based organizations, co-ops, social enterprises, and more.
 - c. Create a smoother transition pathway from education to employment that not only values and celebrates culture, social equity, and gender equality but also enables conditions for a just transition. This includes providing more information on training programs, skills development, job opportunities, internships, and more.
- 2. Recognize, embrace, and elevate the voice of women, people of color, and other underrepresented groups, especially within the Pacific diaspora:**
 - a. Make a seat for everyone at the table—enabling fair, just, and equitable conditions for everyone to feel included in the discussions and decisionmaking processes.
 - b. Identify solutions that enable and empower women and underrepresented groups to engage in and seek employment opportunities within the green sector, for example, expanding on the efforts of building a locally grown workforce tailored for jobs in conservation and natural resource management such as through Kupu's NRSP initiative and offering compensation benefits that cover caretaking and other livelihood responsibilities that pose as barriers to green learning and green employment.
 - c. Allow the ideas and contributions of underrepresented voices to germinate and flourish without judgment and ridicule.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we recognize that as the impacts of climate change evolve and continue to change the livelihood of our people, our ways of thinking, learning, and adapting to this phenomenon must also evolve. We recognize the incredible value and the important role postsecondary institutions in Hawai'i have in ensuring that present and future generations have a fighting chance to address issues surrounding climate change, green learning, sustainability, and environmental injustices.

As evident from the collective voices and insights shared by our case study participants, the critical role PSIs play is to be a culturally responsive and empowering entity that would help enable conditions for achieving a just transition. The key themes that emerged from this case study: *aloha 'aina* (love of land), cultural reciprocity, and the value and power of partnerships with CBOs are consistent factors in helping to inform and shape a New Green Learning Agenda in Hawai'i, especially one that achieves a just transition rooted in the indigenous knowledge and Hawaiian cultural logics.

Hawai'i's historical experience with environmental racism, its geographic vulnerabilities to climate change, and its cultural landscape of green learning approaches offer a unique perspective to defining a New Green Learning Agenda for postsecondary institutions in Oceania that is rooted in and empowered by indigenous knowledge and local practices around the stewardship of natural resources and the land.

Furthermore, Hawai'i's location both in Oceania and the U.S. offers postsecondary institutions (PSIs) significant opportunities to drive a just transition in the U.S. that cultivates relationships with Pacific SIDS, while addressing environmental and climate injustices in U.S.-Pacific regional affairs. By centering and amplifying the voices of Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other historically marginalized populations in Hawai'i, efforts to define a new green learning agenda in Hawai'i will be rooted in local cultural logics for climate justice.



Endnotes

- 1 Some of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world are SIDS in Oceania. Yet, while SIDS have not been contributors to greenhouse emissions and have extremely low to negligible carbon footprints, colonization and environmental racism coupled with poverty and power imbalances on the global stage have left many SIDS with inadequate tools and resources, including green learning opportunities, to combat the existential threat of climate change in empowering ways.
- 2 In the context of community colleges in Hawai'i, where faculty carry some of the highest course loads of any PSIs (i.e., five courses in the fall, four in the spring), doing sustainability work as service takes on an additional layer of significance. As one participant explained, faculty who take on additional administrative duties to manage sustainability programs and certificates often get their course loads reduced, a practice which has been viewed as appropriate compensation.