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INVERTING INCLUSION: A CASE STUDY FROM
THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MĀNOA

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A key question regarding inclusion is: who gets to issue the invitation? It presumes that someone is in a position of host, and that they may invite others who are not currently participating in something. It could be a recognition of an existing power dynamic, or it could create one. In this case study from the College of Social Sciences at UHM, we challenged the presumption that individuals from historically underrepresented groups are to be invited, rather than to be the ones issuing the invitation.

I have worked at UHM since 2008, during and after PhD studies in philosophy. I first came to Hawai'i for a conference of business schools when I was still employed at the University of Colorado at Boulder during philosophy MA studies. Although most of that trip was spent in aggressively air-conditioned hotel conference rooms, I did have a day and a half to explore O'ahu. It was enlightening! Until then, Hawai'i had existed to me as a movie locale or vacation destination. I did not imagine people living and working here, dealing with traffic, bus schedules, childcare, and all the mundane concerns of daily life. I applied to the doctoral program at UHM and was admitted by the time that I returned for a second time to attend a graduate student philosophy conference. I mention this because I know what it is like to arrive in Honolulu completely unencumbered by any historical or cultural knowledge of the islands.

I also introduce myself because it is customary in Hawai'i to be introduced to someone. Failing that, to introduce yourself with a description of your relationship to the island you are on. For people born and raised in Hawai'i, that frequently includes the high school attended. For

Native Hawaiians, it includes a reference to ancestors and geographical origins. Local culture and Hawaiian culture overlap somewhat but are distinct from one another. However, everyone expects you to let them know who you are and where you come from before any interaction.

This case study involves CSS International Programs. For some time, the college has offered short-term programs to international groups, primarily from Japan. These programs typically were led by a faculty member of a university with some connection to CSS, frequently a colleague who is faculty in the college, or an alumni participant. Until relatively recently, the programs offered through CSS were similar to others offered on the UHM campus. They included some instruction in the English language, cultural experiences such as a hula lesson, and field trips to destinations such as Pearl Harbor. The concluding ceremony consisted of students giving presentations of some experience they had while in Hawai'i, which forced them to practice use of the English language, as well as public speaking. They were given a typical catered American meal, such as steak with potatoes, vegetables, and cake for dessert. Each student came forward to receive a certificate of completion, a box of Hawaiian Host chocolates, and a shell necklace with a green and white pompon (UH colors). The highlight for many was having their photo taken with the English-language instructor, program coordinator, and student assistant.

The staff member who had served as coordinator of International Programs left the college and I filled in on an interim basis. For the first summer, I followed the schedule that had been established, as described above. However, I noticed that the visiting students really wanted some connection with others their age. They were in classrooms for their English language studies with instructors we hired, so they remained as a cohort, not mixing with local students. Another observation was that the field trips did not seem to connect with any theme or topic.

Pearl Harbor was always requested by Japanese groups, but other selections were based on availability, and sometimes whether or not it was raining that day. Further, the concluding ceremony seemed anticlimactic, as they rarely had an audience to present to, other than one another and some local faculty with ties to Japan. Aside from the field trips, it was an experience they could have in any U.S. city. It did not integrate their presence in Hawai‘i, and most certainly did not engage with any aspect of Native Hawaiian culture.

For the next set of programs, we attempted inclusion – to add some Hawai‘i-specific elements through an integration with CSS service-learning activities. That program has many local students over the summer, and some are Native Hawaiian. In addition, the program director has deep ties to the local community. We eliminated most English-language instruction, adding the visiting students to some sessions of summer classes offered by accommodating faculty. We also added the visiting students to service-learning field trips, such as restoring a Native Hawaiian fishpond or tending to taro. The students enjoyed meeting local students their age, and some enjoyed the field trips. However, the faculty member accompanying the group was not pleased. He viewed their work at the fishpond as free labor, when they had paid for this program. Further, he had no interest in working bare foot in the taro field. He and the students stayed for what was intended to be an introductory talk-story but left without engaging with the taro cultivation, which is done barefoot. We had included Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiian elements into the program, but the result was unsuccessful. We had attempted to include Native Hawaiian culture and practices into a program that was not Hawaiian in perspective or practice.

So, we threw out all the templates. I engaged the director and some of the student workers in the service-learning program and we started from scratch. We considered what visiting students should know about Hawai‘i in order to be responsible guests – rather than what

we should provide to them as clients who have only a vague idea of what they expect to experience. At a minimum, I felt strongly that we needed to let them know they are guests in someone's home, even if they do not realize it. Hawai'i is not a movie set or an amusement park. It is a place where people thrived long before white people noticed. Descendants of those people are still here, and it is important to engage with the host culture responsibly. Although outnumbered in today's island census, and historically excluded, it would be appropriate for Native Hawaiians to issue the invitation to experience their home.

I outlined the 2-3 week schedule by day on a white board, and we struggled with how to convey Hawai'i history, geography, language and culture in such a short time. We created blocks of time that started with an afternoon introduction to a theme. The next morning, an activity or field trip was conducted to illustrate that theme, ending with a lunch that had food connected to the theme. Students wrote brief reaction papers to each block of time. An example is the plantation period in Hawai'i. A graduate student who is researching in this period gave an informal presentation that covered the history and politics of plantation times in the afternoon. The next morning, the field trip was to Hawai'i Plantation Village, followed by a plate lunch. Over lunch, they learned some pidgin words. Both the pidgin dialect and the plate lunch cuisine grew out of the communities of workers imported to work in the plantations from China, Japan, the Philippines, and even Spain.

We also considered how to give the students time to acclimate. Direct field work, such as the fishpond restoration or taro cultivation, was moved to the final days of the program. We began with an overview of island geography, and the way that it was historically divided into wedges (like pieces of pie) with a narrow tip in the mountains, through the valleys, to a wider section of beach. Each ahupua'a was able to sustain a series of communities through exchange of

food produced at each level. We showed the visiting students on a map where their field trips would be – one in the mountain area, one in the valley, and one at beach level. During each field trip, we reminded them of their connection to land and location. Local students went along on each field trip to tie it into the overall experience and serve as a resource.

We are very fortunate in CSS to have a coordinator of Native Hawaiian Initiatives. In one of the initial sessions, he gave a brief overview of the Hawaiian language, of letters and pronunciation. He also created a game with matching cards. On the front was a photo of a place that they would visit, and the Hawaiian name was on the back. Each visiting student was paired with a local student to play the game. We had small prizes for the most matches. One day, we were running over time playing this game in the afternoon session. I awarded prizes based on how many matches had been made thus far, and said they were free to depart. They all stayed to finish the game!

We retained the gift of chocolate, but gave each student a piece of craft chocolate produced in Hawai‘i during the welcome ceremony on the first day. As part of that welcome, we showed all of the islands on a map and asked if they knew which island they were on. (I would have failed during my first TWO visits.) We highlighted what is unique about Hawai‘i now, and made reference to the Hawaiian kingdom, which was covered in more detail in a later session.

We also retained the hula lesson but changed it from one taught by a Waikiki performer that ended with a certificate, to hula as a cultural practice. They were taught a hula in one session that they practiced again several times over the weeks. At the concluding ceremony, they danced the hula on the lawn as a group. They still did final presentations as groups, but the concluding ceremony was an overflow crowd, as all the students they had interacted with came to cheer them on.

Rather than presenting them with shell lei, we added a cultural practice session teaching them how to tie their own ti leaf lei the day before the concluding ceremony. We then presented them with their own lei in the concluding ceremony – which is not exactly appropriate, as lei are given to you by someone else, but it allowed them to keep their own handiwork as a souvenir. The menu for the concluding ceremony was Hawaiian food, which was also enjoyed by many of the local students who had accompanied our visitors on field trips or engaged with them during class sessions.

During one of the last concluding ceremonies that I was involved in, I was talking with the faculty escort from Japan. I asked him (somewhat hesitantly) what he thought of working in the taro fields. He had taken a lot of photos, which he shared on a monitor while everyone ate. I saw him in the photos with pant legs rolled up, barefoot in the field. He said that he was not looking forward to that field trip when the program began, but after understanding the sibling relationship of taro and Hawaiian people, he was willing to give it a try. He said when his foot was in the mud, he could feel the air in the mud and the connection was a moving experience.

The redesign of the approach – the inversion of inclusion – was successful. The visiting students loved it, and especially enjoyed the connections they made with local students. The local students enjoyed meeting someone from another country, and some tried out language skills. Most of the instructional sessions were conducted by graduate students, who received a small stipend. They enjoyed the presentations (which can also be listed on a CV) and appreciated the money. Overall, it cost less than it had to hire English instructors and the payoff was far greater. The experience of welcoming an invited visitor into your home is much warmer than working for a paying customer.

The visiting students also got to see Hawai‘i through the eyes of their hosts. This is especially poignant for the Pearl Harbor field trip. I question the ethics of taking visiting Japanese students to Pearl Harbor without also letting them know of the great sorrow experienced by Native Hawaiians when that beautiful space was commandeered by the U.S. military, excluding all locals from customary fishing and recreational uses. That appropriation also aimed military forces at some countries the Kingdom of Hawai‘i had established peace treaties with, in former days. Deciding the history of that harbor begins with a bombing is a very colonial perspective.

We are now taking a similar approach to a training program for visiting scholars. These are primarily faculty from universities across the world who come to Hawai‘i to research, write, and collaborate with colleagues. Rather than presentations in person, we will have recorded introductions to Hawaiian topics that may be viewed online before visitors arrive. Our hope is to similarly adjust their perspective to that of a guest – someone invited to participate in activities aligned with the host culture, where appropriate.

I began with an introduction, and I must conclude with giving thanks to the many people who assisted with this transformation. Dr. Ulla Hasager is director of Civic Engagement for CSS. In addition to teaching, she organizes professional development for faculty, graduate students, and community partners. Her connections with community and enthusiasm for experimentation were essential to the success of this project. Kamakana Aquino is the coordinator of Hui ‘Āina Pilipili: Native Hawaiian Initiative for CSS. He helped us to reimagine the overall program, as well as creating teaching modules and games customized to each group. Daven Chang was an undergraduate student when we first revised the program. It is impossible to capture the many ways his welcoming heart contributed: helping to construct a new schedule, locating graduate

students to conduct lessons, gathering ti leaves and teaching how to braid them into a lei, helping to arrange and serve the celebratory meal. Many, many UHM students, faculty, and staff also helped in this transformation. We have all been gathered in this place by CSS Dean Denise Eby Konan, who fully supported our desire to foreground Native Hawaiian experience, to invert inclusion.