

## Journal of American Indian Education

Volume 41 Number 2  
Special Issue  
2002

### THE STORY OF THE HAWAIIAN STUDIES CENTER ON THE BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY-HAWAI'I CAMPUS

Maenette K. P. Benham

La'iewai is an *ahupua'a*<sup>1</sup> of the *moku*<sup>2</sup> of Ko'olauloa, located on the northwest end of the island of O'ahu. William Wallace, III (Uncle Bill Wallace, personal interview, 2002) explains in the textbook, *World Communities*, that the origin of the name *La'ie* comes from two Hawaiian words: "the first being *lau*, meaning *leaf* and the second being *ie*, referring to the *ie* vine of the red-spiked climbing pandanus tree" (Allen, et al., 2002, p. 4). Hawaiian mythology tells that the *ie* vine is sacred to the god Kane, the procreator, and the goddess of hula, Laka. Indeed, the *ahupua'a* of La'ie, prior to Western contact, provided rich resources with its many *lo'i kalo* (taro terraces) and its ocean (*ke kai*) filled with marine life. In historical times, it also provided sanctuary as a *pu'uhonua*, a sacred place where fugitives could seek safety from their pursuers.

Since 1864, when Brigham Young sent Francis A. Hammond and George Nebeker to Hawai'i to locate a settlement for the Mormon community, La'ie has become the gathering place for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS).<sup>3</sup> On February 12, 1955, a place was set aside to build a four-year university, and on September 26, 1955, in temporary facilities, Church College of Hawai'i (CCH) opened its doors to young learners throughout the Pacific Basin. Its name was formally changed to Brigham Young University-Hawai'i (BYU-H) Campus in 1974. With so many students

from across the Pacific arriving at Church College, the LDS Church established the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC), which opened October 12, 1963, as an enterprise that would provide economic support for its students and serve to share, preserve, and revitalize the diverse cultures of the Pacific Islanders.

As a gathering place for members of the Mormon Church, the community is populated by a diverse membership of Polynesian, Micronesian, Melanesian, Asian-derived, African and African American, Mexican and Latino/a, European, and Euro-American peoples. Although many community residents are members of the Mormon Church, there are many who adhere to other faiths or have other affiliations. Much of the land is owned and managed by Hawaii Reserves, Inc. (HRI), but there are also *kuleana* lands (family held properties) and privately owned lands.

Whereas this diversity has been a hallmark of the community due to the influence of the university, PCC, and the Mormon Temple, it has also been its achilles heel. In particular, the Hawaiian voice, the home culture and its people, has been invisible since the Mormon Church purchased the land in 1865. Kela Miller and Theresa Bigbie (personal interviews, December 2001), both Native Hawaiian women whose family lineage in La'ie goes back many generations, talked about the importance of PCC's work to share the many cultures of the Pacific. However, they believed that this mission, over time, had placed Hawaiian protocol and language behind church and other Polynesian protocol (e.g., Samoan, Tongan, and Maori). Uncle Bill Wallace (personal interview, December 2001), Director of the John Napela Center, also shared that when dignitaries came to the *ahupua'a*, university administrators would call on other

Polynesian groups to welcome the guests: “Where were the Hawaiians? We were not to be found.”

### **The Story of the Project to Reclaim Native Hawaiian Voice**

There’s an old Hawaiian proverb that says—In the language is life. In the language is death.—We have lost too much of our ancient history and it would be tragic to let what is left slip away from us as well. Although we don’t fully understand right now, I’m sure as time goes on, we will better realize why reclaiming the language is such an important undertaking for our people. (Terry Panee, Hawaiian Language Teacher, quoted in Taylor, 1998, p. 21)

The absence of a Hawaiian Studies program at BYU-Hawai‘i, and the absence of Native Hawaiian protocol at public and community events, although rarely questioned in public venues, over many years created a chasm of mistrust and ill feeling between local Native Hawaiians and newcomers to the land. Rebecca Tucci, a staff writer of the school newspaper, *Ke Alaka‘i*, wrote in her August 26, 1998, article entitled “Uniting Nations: The Hawaiian Studies Program Makes The Call To Unite Polynesia”: “The Hawaiian Studies program at BYU-H was only recently developed. According to some of those who were present at the conference, the program began 20 years later than some would have preferred” (Tucci, 1998).

Understanding that the home people of the land were invisible on campus, BYU-Hawai‘i’s President Eric B. Shumway, in the fall of 1996, announced that the university would establish a Hawaiian Studies program funded by private donations. He shared,

When I became the president I realized that I had an opportunity to probably make an impact on the future of the university. In the process of our developing priorities for the university, I insisted that we launch a Hawaiian Studies program, but I wanted to avoid the politics of going through the regular budget process. So, I proposed that as an

academic program it would be funded by philanthropic dollars. (personal interview, December 2002)

In a speech delivered at the launching of the program's double-hulled voyaging canoe, *Iosepa*, on November 3, 2001, Shumway anchored the program's goals on the following four principles:

To preserve and perpetuate the true spirit of aloha, which is the love of God and one's fellow men and women. To teach the language and culture of our great Hawaiian heritage within an environment of faith, respect, and unity. To instill a sense of identity, a sense of gratitude, and a sense of righteous aspiration in all those who feel connected to the Hawaiian heritage. To knit the hearts and minds and skills belonging to the university with those of our Hawaiian community at large, our kupuna (elders), in order to inspire a rising generation with those ideals that are both energizing and ennobling.

Funding for this program began with a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant of \$619,000. The prestige of winning a Kellogg grant provided BYU–Hawai'i development officers an unprecedented opportunity to leverage their monies and attract other local philanthropic donors. On September 23, 1997, the Alexander and Baldwin Foundation gave the university \$25,000 to support the development of the Hawaiian Studies program. John Couch, President of Alexander and Baldwin, wrote in the donation letter (September 23, 1997):

We're very enthusiastic about what's being accomplished here with the Hawaiian Studies program. What appealed to the Foundation Trustees was the merit of this project and desire to preserve the culture in a way that dealt with very comprehensive issues; not just political issues, but the history and culture itself.

On February 12, 1998, 43 years after the founding of the university in La'ie, the Jonathan Napela Center for Hawaiian Language and Cultural Studies (name given in

2000) was launched, under the visionary leadership of Dr. William Kauaiwi'ulaokalani Wallace III (Uncle Bill). It is important to know that the Hawaiian name for the center, gifted by Kamo'a Walk, is *Ka Halau Nui A Hawai'iloa*, the Sacred School of *Hawai'iloa* (sacred ancestor). The vision of the center, succinctly stated by Uncle Bill, is to "develop and support a network of Hawaiian language and cultural teachers, educators, and professionals that will actively preserve and perpetuate positive Hawaiian cultural values and practices committed to the principles of *lokahi*, *laulima*, *kokua*, and *aloha*" (staff of *Kaleo o Ko'olauloa*, 1998, p. 1). Within a year and a half, in June 1999, Lario Ka'iloa Ursua became the first Native Hawaiian student graduated with a degree in Hawaiian Studies from BYU-Hawai'i.

To ensure that the initiative would have broad community participation and honor the people of the land, the Native Hawaiians, the center hosted its first Kupuna (elder) Conference, *Ka Halau Nui A Hawai'iloa*, on August 15, 1998. Thirty *kupuna* attended the conference, providing wise direction.<sup>5</sup> Uncle Bill Wallace (2000) said of their contribution:

They said there are three components of our culture which must be represented in our curriculum: (a) mental and rational, (b) spiritual and emotional, and (c) physical and mental. In order to accomplish the above, we must do the following: (a) Develop a strong Hawaiian language program. The knowledge of our people is in understanding the *leo*, or their voices. We must also remember Hawaiian is a language of the heart and of the spirit. (b) Encourage students to be well grounded in understanding and use of the English language. They will need to know it well, write it well, and understand it well in order to succeed in the contemporary world. (c) Use holistic methods in teaching students. Teach them concepts, which help them become not just good Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders, but good human beings, productive, secure in their language, culture, values, and their complete identity. (d) Learn and live our legacy, and leave a legacy to our children, our *mo'opuna* of our posterity. Take care or *malama*,

protect the intellectual property rights of everything we do. If we created it, if we developed it, we should by all means have the benefit of sharing it and telling the world about it. (e) Use academic freedom to pursue, retain, and perpetuate all aspects of our culture, which elevates the human mind and spirit. Be honest and have courage to develop credibility as classical scholars whose information, concepts, and ideas are deeply embedded not only in the mind, but [also] in the heart and spirit of our people. (f) The portrayal of our poetry, music, song, dance, arts, crafts, oratory, ecology, celestial navigation, hydroponics, medicine, healing, dispute resolution and so on assures the longevity of our people.

In BYU-H's third year annual progress report (2000, February 9) to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the program directors provided an overview of the goals of the educational activity:

Our goal continues to be making Hawaiian language and culture available to students of Hawaiian ancestry as well as to students of all ethnic identities. Such a program will continue to serve as an "identity recovery" function for many Hawaiian students whose upbringing has not allowed them to experience their own culture. . . Beyond this, and of equal importance, BYU-Hawai'i maintains that the understanding of an indigenous culture makes a unique contribution in the postmodern world. Specifically, comparative understanding of the Hawaiian language and culture will continue to lead to the diversity of the understanding of interpersonal, inter-group, and person/environmental relationships. As understanding is fostered student-by-student, group-by-group, subgroup-by-subgroup, indigenous knowledge will continue to serve a leavening function that will extend the influence of Hawai'i and of this program far beyond these islands and the Pacific. (p. 1)

The first step was to develop a Hawaiian Studies curriculum. In partnership with Richard Kamo'a'e Walk, Wallace developed such a curriculum, which would include four years of Hawaiian language and Hawaiian cultural immersion projects. Both scholars spent much of the first and second years of the program working through the curriculum. Their work led them to reach out to their community elders, as well as to

other similar programs in New Zealand (Maori) and Washington State (Skokomish). Through many discussions and much sharing of ideas, the Hawaiian Language and Studies program began to take shape and continues to be defined into its third and fourth years.

In partnership with faculty across the university, community *kupuna*, cultural specialists, and scholars from PCC, the Hawaiian Studies Center's staff developed new courses in Hawaiian language, Years 1 through 4. Hawaiian Studies classes covered topics on literary subjects, Native Hawaiian weaving and music, and Hawaiian public and oral history. A new course was developed to teach *Malama 'Aina* (care for the land). Native Hawaiian worldviews regarding land responsibility, land rights, land cultivation (native agriculture and healing), and land conservation are taught. Another new course, which teaches the value of *Malama Kai* (care for the sea), is focused on nurturing and caring for the ocean as a place of abundant resources as well as a highway to the world. These courses are essential core experiences for the Hawaiian Studies major as they teach the importance of the interrelationship of land and sea, and the stewardship of maintaining a proper balance between both life forces.

The Hawaiian Studies program has worked effectively with departments and faculty across the university to further develop its baccalaureate requirements. For example, the faculty of the Hawaiian Studies Center has worked with faculty in other disciplinary areas to ensure that students' learning experiences represent both the scholarly richness of the field and the culture and perspective of Native Hawaiians. Courses that reflect this point of view can be found in the disciplines of history, biology, international communication, exercise science, political science, anthropology, English, and music.

These conversations across disciplines have also encouraged the development of substantive interdisciplinary coursework that fulfills the mission of the university to honor and learn about diverse cultures on a global scale. Jeff Burroughs (personal interview, December 2001), Dean of the Social Science Division, shared,

What we are really trying to do here is to equip people with a degree of intercultural competence. We're trying to be more planful in the way that we do this, and from my perspective, Hawaiian Studies is really, really important. . . . Over the last couple of years we have revamped our world history general education requirement. Some schools have a Western history course, but we wanted to make our course more comparative and writing intensive. It is a two- course sequence taught by a team of 12 faculty involved as a large community lecture, then small breakout sessions. The course is not called world history, but world communities. We thought that what we needed to do is start with our own community [La'ie], so Uncle Bill is the first lecturer. Throughout the course we study Pacific Island history, East Asian communities, ethnic diversity in the United States, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

The energy has continued to involve the Native Hawaiian Studies Program and faculty across diverse disciplines, such as literature and the performing and visual arts, to develop learning experiences that are both academically rigorous and that honor the home culture. The program continues to provide multiple learning opportunities. For example, Kawika Eskaran (master carver and current lead instructor in both the *Malama 'Aina* and *Malama Kai* lab projects) talked about the possibility of future work with the university's math and science department. He is hopeful that they might collaboratively build curriculum that will use canoe construction, agriculture, and Hawaiian medicinal plants as integral parts of the learning experience. It is important to Kawika that the Hawaiian Studies program link not only with other disciplines across the university, but also with K-12 schools in the community.

Currently, the challenge for the Hawaiian Studies program is working with the Teacher Education division. The program instructors all spoke of the need for their students to be provided opportunities through the teacher preparation process to student teach in Department of Education Hawaiian language immersion schools. Several students who had either graduated from or were currently enrolled in the teacher preparation program and the Hawaiian Studies program talked about the difficulty of being placed in immersion schools. One student shared, “We are required to teach in a traditional public school. There’s a feeling that the public immersion schools aren’t good enough.” Another student shared his observation that their community’s Hawaiian immersion school was as academically rigorous as what he had observed in the local elementary school. Another student lamented the fact that there is little dialogue between the two programs:

There is so much that they can do together to help us [future teachers] teach our students, who live in Hawai’i, what it means to live here. We learn things in our Hawaiian Studies classes and we learn different ways of teaching, too, that all new teachers should know.

Just as the Center’s work to build effective learning experiences has facilitated the breaking down of boundaries across disciplines and faculties at the university, it has also changed attitudes toward and activities of university outreach across the *moku*, and in particular with the Native Hawaiian community. For example, community members, *kupuna*, university administrators, and program faculty spoke about the increased value and genuine practice of fundamental Hawaiian life principles of *aloha*, *laulima*, and *ho’ihi*. Kawika Eskaran (personal interview, December 2001) explained,

Our canoe project helped the community understand that we [in the Hawaiian Studies program and at the university] are here to build the spirit of *aloha*. I've seen families become closer, spouses and their children. There is a certain spirit that develops when you work and learn side by side, and that's what Malama 'Aina and Mamala Kai seek to do. Gathering, Hawaiian gatherings, is about *laulima*, cooperation. I have lived here [La'ie] since I graduated from high school [1974], and there have not been any community projects that have created *laulima*. So this project was risky, but I think, because the canoe has symbolic meaning for Hawaiians, all Polynesians, it brought cooperation. This was a well-coordinated effort among all the participating entities that created the spirit of *ho'ihi* [respect].

Although the work to build the Center's outreach, service, and partnerships with the community has taxed the energy of its faculty and students, it has ensured that appropriate and respectful Native Hawaiian protocol is practiced and it has helped to build bridges between BYU-Hawai'i and its many neighbors. There are many, many examples of this effort; however, several activities highlight the Center's outreach. For example, "On November 7, 1998, the Director and several students were called upon to support a neighboring community in establishing proper Hawaiian protocol for receiving a completed single hull outrigger canoe. This request came from the La'ie Waterman's Association and the canoe was coming from the adjoining *moku* of Ko'olau Poko" (Brigham Young University Hawai'i [BYU-H], 2000, p. 10). In partnership with community *kupuna* and La'ie community members, on January 15, 1999, the program director and students participated in dedication services for a Hawaiian nursery sponsored by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. In February 1999, students welcomed, with appropriate chants of *aloha*, the President of French Polynesia (Tahiti) to the BYU-Hawai'i campus. Later in the year, they extended a similar welcome to a visiting dignitary from Mongolia.

The Center's service and outreach to its *ahupua'a*, *moku*, island, and the State of Hawai'i also extends globally. For example, in 1999, Uncle Bill Wallace traveled to Aotearoa (New Zealand) to deliver papers on traditional ways of learning, means of safeguarding intellectual property rights, and processes of developing mutual respect for cultural treasures at the Center for Maori and Pacific Development at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, the Sir James Henare Research Center at the University of Auckland in Auckland, and Whare Wananga Te Awa Nui a Rangi at Whakatane. The Center's Hawaiian language instructor, Kamo'a'e Walk, in a cultural exchange with the Skokomish Indian Tribe of Washington State and Vancouver, British Columbia, shared cultural practices.

Partnerships with multiple community groups have enabled the Center to successfully establish and ensure the sustainability of the *lo'i kalo* (taro terraces) and the *wa'a kaulua* (double hulled canoe). Instrumental to the current success of the Center's activities are the university's linkages with Hawai'i Reserves, Inc., the Polynesian Cultural Center, the La'ie Community Foundation, and the La 'ie Community Association, and guidance from their *kupuna* council.

Indeed, all of the community constituents and especially the community associations share a sense of stewardship. Proper timing, having the right people in the right places, and having the resources from all the partners, including the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, actualized this important learning and community-building project.

## Reflections on the Initiative

During the 1999-2000 academic year, a little more than a year into the program, 20 students were majoring in Hawaiian Studies and three students graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Hawaiian Studies (BYU-H, 2000). When program instructors, university administrators, and community members were asked to describe the success of the program, all spoke about the students. Jeff Burroughs (personal interview, December 2001) shared that like other academic programs on the campus, the Hawaiian Studies program was evaluated on the basis of its productivity, or in the language of academia, the number of students enrolled in the courses and graduation rates. He stated, "Obviously, those are kind of university benchmarks for productivity. The number of students in the cultural studies courses is strong. The Hawaiian language course is probably more challenging." The program as a whole, he added, has had positive effects on the careers of its graduates:

Placement is another benchmark. Students graduate, when they major in Hawaiian Studies, with a strong liberal arts degree. We have graduates going into top law schools on the West Coast. I see people going into management training. I think employers are interested in the ability of people to do problem solving, think critically, and communicate effectively. This program excels at that, plus Hawaiian Studies give you the comparative perspective as well as cultural success and cultural competence.

Kamoa'e Walk (personal interview, December 2001), acknowledging the importance of these benchmarks, talked eloquently and passionately about the importance of cultural knowledge:

The Western mindset of education is that you go and you get an education because it tells you, the report says you'll make \$10,000 more per year if you do. And you go to college to get a job, but knowledge has a value in and of itself. These students realize that. They say, "My heart tells me that I need to know this [cultural] knowledge too."

Summer Santiago (personal interview, December 2001), a graduate of the program and currently a teacher in the public schools language immersion (Hawaiian language) program, shared:

One point is that the program is based on family. You know we call Uncle Bill, *Uncle Bill*—it's that kind of respect we show each other. Everything is about family. There is a lot of community ties here, too. Sometimes Hawaiian gets forgotten here, it's been a real obstacle, but I have to speak Hawaiian. It's something I have to do for myself and my kids. I have to make sure that our language doesn't die. Just in the store talking, a lot of people trip out 'cause I start talking to my kids and they say, "Are you speaking Hawaiian?" That's so cool. It's like, "Yeah!" We are not just a minority kept on the back burner like before. The Hawaiian Studies program has brought us out in the community. We are able to express our culture, with pride, like the other Polynesians who live here.

Summer said it all! She and the many students she will touch as a teacher provide reason enough for the effort we put into developing culturally appropriate curriculum. What we have learned from the story is that placing leadership to make a difference in the center for everyone to participate in the process increases the positive effects of professionals, individuals, and institutions working collaboratively to do good work. Indeed, what we find in this story is an example of a culturally respectful and appropriate program that has scholarly integrity and rigor that increases positive ethnic identity among students, provides new opportunities and challenging ideas across

disciplines for teachers and professors, and connects an institution of learning to the communities it serves.

**Maenette K.P. Ah Nee-Benham** is an Associate Professor of Educational Administration in the College of Education at Michigan State University. A Native Hawaiian scholar and teacher, her inquiry centers on the nature of engaged educational leadership particularly in native/indigenous communities, the wisdom of knowing and praxis of social justice envisioned and enacted by ethnic minority women and men school leaders; and the effects of educational policy on native/indigenous people. She teaches graduate level course work in school leadership, school change, organizational theory, research methods, and school-family-community relations. Maenette has taught grades K/1, 3/4, and 7-12, and was both an elementary school administrator and a central office curriculum director. She is the lead author of numerous articles on these topics, and has published several books to include: *Culture and Educational Policy in Hawai'i: The Silencing of Native Voices* (Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers), *Let My Spirit Soar! The Narratives of Diverse Women in School Leadership* (Corwin Press), and *Indigenous Educational Models for Contemporary Practice: In Our Mother's Voice* (Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers).

Author acknowledges the contribution of Dr. Anna M. Ortiz to the data collection and writing of this piece.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>An *ahupua'a* is a land division, triangular in shape from the mountain to the sea.

<sup>2</sup>A *moku* is a land division that may consist of several *ahupua'a*.

<sup>3</sup>George Nebeker, in January 1865, purchased the *ahupua'a* on behalf of the church, and he served as both the mission president and manager of the land from 1892 to 1895. In 1879 the title to the land "was transferred to the president of the Church in Utah, who held the property in trust" (Allen, et al., 2002, p. 8). Today, the church-owned Hawaii Reserves Inc. (HRI) manages the land.

<sup>4</sup>Jonathan Napela was a Hawaiian *ali'i* (royalty) and judge who joined the Mormon Church on January 5, 1852. He was an important leader and helped translate *The Book of Mormon* into the Hawaiian language.

<sup>5</sup>Videotapes and transcript from the Kupuna Conference are available from BYU-H.

<sup>6</sup>The course instructors have developed a test used in the course entitled *World Communities: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, Boston, Pearson Custom Publishing, 2002.

### References

Allen, J. M, Belnap, J., Beus, D., Compton, C., Han, S., Ludlow, J. W., Robertson, D. B., Taala, T., Tueller, J. B., Wallace, W. K., Weber, M., Weberg, G., Ward, K., Williams, N., & Wineera, V. (2002). *World communities: A multidisciplinary reader*. Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Brigham Young University-Hawai'i. (2000, February 9). *Annual progress report year 3* (Prepared for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation). Laie, HI: Author.

Shumway, E. B. (2001, November 3). Address presented at the Launching of Iosepa, Hawai'i's Newest Double-Hulled Voyaging Canoe. Laie, HI.

Staff. (1998, February 26). BYUH launches Hawaiian Studies program. *Kaleo o Ko'olauloa* (school newspaper), 3(4), 1-2.

Taylor, R. (1988, *Special Sesquicentennial Issue*). Preserving the language of Aloha. *BYU Hawaii Profile Magazine*, pp. 22-23.

Tucci, R. (1998, August 26). Uniting Nations: The Hawaiian Studies Program Makes the Call to Unite Polynesia. *Ke Alaka'i* (student newspaper).

Wallace, W. K., III. (2000, January 13). *Kahua ola: The making of Brigham Young University- Hawai'i Campus* (Convocation Address), Laie, HI.