

## **Hawai‘i Earns an Education "World's First"**

The task of education integration from preschool to graduate school, or P-20 education, has become a major focus in Hawai‘i, the Continental United States, and in other countries. An international accrediting body, the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC), recently awarded its first accreditation to such a P-20 system -- the Hawaiian Maui Ola Education System.

Leaders of the Hawaiian language revitalization movement acknowledge this accreditation as a major milestone -- an educational "world's first" recognition honoring UH-Hilo's Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language and its P-20 programs. The system is unique and distinct in its use of Hawaiian as the language of instruction and has a proven record of producing college- and career-ready high school graduates. Advocates believe that such a revitalized system of Hawaiian medium education can reestablish Hawai‘i as a world education leader, as was the case in the 1800s.

The statewide Maui Ola Education System integrates programs from cradle (infant/toddler) to university (Ph.D.) to careers and lifelong learning that include Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani College's baccalaureate and graduate programs, the College's Hale Kuamo‘o Hawaiian Language Center, and its laboratory school programs, including all 11 Pūnana Leo preschools, Ke Kula ‘O Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u, Ke Kula ‘O Samuel M. Kamakau, Ke Kula Ni‘ihau O Kekaha, and Ke Kula ‘O Kawaikini. Created through a mandate from the 1997 Hawai‘i State Legislature, the System now serves some 1,500 students.

Ke‘elikōlani College Director Dr. Kalena Silva and College Professor Keiki Kawai‘ae‘a received this recognition at the WINHEC General Annual Meeting held at the Sami University College in Guovdageaidnu, Norway in August. An indigenous international body, the WINHEC Accreditation Authority was founded on the principles of the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and supports the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education and the Mataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights.

The WINHEC accreditation process requires a review by a team of international indigenous education experts. The review gives special recognition to institutions that demonstrate a strong educational commitment to the language, culture, and traditional practices of their communities and to academic and cultural values that integrate performance, integrity, and quality. The WINHEC Accreditation Authority is chaired by Dr. Ray Barnhardt of the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

WINHEC has previously accredited a number of indigenous universities and colleges in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and Europe, but Keʻelikōlani is the first College accredited in the United States. The College's Maui Ola Education System is the first P-20 system WINHEC has accredited anywhere in the world.

"Several features of this accreditation make this recognition significant," said Silva. "Indigenous peoples throughout the world are losing their languages to extinction. Our languages are extremely important vehicles for maintaining cultural distinctiveness and worldviews. This WINHEC accreditation recognizes Keʻelikōlani College's success in revitalizing Hawaiian and in creating an educational model from which other indigenous peoples may learn and take inspiration. In the face of current difficult economic circumstances in the U.S., this accreditation also allows us to apply for program funding that might not be available to us otherwise."

"WINHEC's accreditation recognizes the academic excellence produced in our preschool to grade 12 laboratory schools," said Kawaiʻaeʻa. "Many people believe that students in schools taught through Hawaiian have the cognitive advantages of high bilingualism usually associated with people from Scandinavia and Canada, countries with representation on the WINHEC Executive Board. Such countries are recognized for their highly multilingual students and for being consistent top performers in the international PISA academic examinations. It is gratifying to see that individuals from such high-performing countries have recognized our programs and accorded us this unique honor."

Kawai‘ae‘a continued, "We are at the cutting edge, having reestablished schooling through our own Hawaiian language and worldview through a fully integrated P-20 system that requires its own unique focus, content, development, matriculation procedures, and administration through our distinctive language. Research supports the educational importance of cultural influences and student engagement through traditional language, sense of place, beliefs, and practices. We observe how these factors positively impact Native Hawaiian student success."

Ke‘elikōlani College plans to seek renewed WINHEC accreditation at appropriate intervals and looks forward to further strengthening its associations with top performing countries in education around the world.