



TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS-SERVING INSTITUTION: A STUDY ON SENSE OF BELONGING AND PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN CULTURE AT LEEWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

T. Ku'uipo Cummings Losch
Leeward Community College

Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity
Volume 10, Issue 1 | 2024

Copyright and Open Access

© 2024 T. Ku'uipo Cummings Losch



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). Permission of the authors is required for distribution and for all derivative works, including compilations and translations. Quoting small sections of text is allowed as long as there is appropriate attribution and the article is used for non-commercial purposes.

The *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity* (ISSN 2642-2387) is published by the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), a production of the University of Oklahoma, in partnership with the University of Oklahoma Libraries.

Towards an Indigenous-Serving Institution: A Study on Sense of Belonging and Perceptions of Native Hawaiian Culture at Leeward Community College

T. Ku'uipo Cummings Losch
Leeward Community College

Leeward Community College is committed to supporting Native Hawaiians, the Indigenous people of Hawai'i. It aims to become a "model indigenous-serving" institution (University of Hawai'i, 2012) as part of the University of Hawai'i system's efforts to empower Hawai'i's Indigenous scholars and their communities. This single-site case study used the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model to assess the degree to which students feel a sense of belonging on their college campus, specifically in their perceptions of Native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiian culture. The data revealed that while most participants felt a sense of belonging on campus, there are disparities between Native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian students and employees. Interviewees emphasized the need for institutional support to prioritize indigenous people, mindsets, environments, and collective wellness in decision-making, leadership, and service to the community.

Access to higher education is critical for Indigenous¹ peoples to secure gainful employment, financial stability, and meaningful civic and community engagement (Gasman et al., 2015; Boland et al., 2019). However, centuries of imperialism, colonization, and racism have created visible and invisible barriers, such as high costs, limited accessibility, and discriminatory attitudes (Louie et al., 2017). As a result, Indigenous peoples have lower enrollment, persistence, and completion rates in higher education compared to non-Indigenous people (Pidgeon, 2016). To address this disparity, many colleges and universities worldwide are committing to integrating Indigenous cultures, knowledge systems, and histories into their institutional structures and policies in an effort to empower Indigenous scholars and communities.

¹Indigenous people are the descendants of those who inhabited a territory before colonization or the formation of the current state (Sarivaara et al., 2013). When referring to Indigenous people as a specific group with unique identities, governments, institutions, and collective rights, it is appropriate to capitalize the term to acknowledge the history of discrimination and marginalization that Indigenous communities face (*Editorial Guide*, n.d.; *Capitalization and Formatting of Indigenous Terms*, n.d.). The University of Hawai'i does not provide a definition or usage guidelines for the term "Indigenous" in its institutional style guide. However, the term is not capitalized in any of the institutional documents. In this study, the term Indigenous will be capitalized unless quoted directly. For a more detailed discussion of indigeneity in research and education, refer to such scholars as Smith (2021) or Alfred and Cornthassel (2005).

Discrediting and diminishing the value of Indigenous knowledge is a colonial tactic to facilitate replacing Indigenous knowledge systems with that of the colonizer. As a result, Indigenous people are made to feel like outsiders in their lands and struggle to find a sense of agency and belonging (Simpson, 2004). The exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems is especially pernicious in higher education institutions because, by their very nature, they perpetuate assimilation processes by emphasizing colonial ideals of academia and knowledge production. Indigenizing the academy, that is, integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into institutional structures and policies, can help to dismantle oppressive systems and provide Indigenous scholars and communities with the tools they need to confront historical injustices, develop solutions to the challenges of centuries of oppression, and succeed in higher education.

In the United States, Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) are higher education institutions that serve a certain number of low-income and underrepresented minority students of color, including Native American, Alaska-Native, and Native Hawaiian populations (Higher Education Act of 1965). These institutions are eligible for federal funding to address these students' enrollment, completion, and achievement gaps. The University of Hawai'i (UH) has ten campuses, three four-year universities, and seven community colleges, all of which qualify as MSIs in the categories of Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving (AANH) and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISI). UH has begun to take significant steps to incorporate Native Hawaiian people, their culture, and histories into its structure, policies, and institutional culture to address achievement gaps for students and an academic environment friendlier to Native Hawaiian scholars. For example, UH's current mission statement expresses its "appreciation of and commitment to indigenous Hawaiian people, culture, values and wisdom," and one of four of its strategic imperatives is to "Fulfill kuleana to Native Hawaiians and Hawai'i" and to "[m]odel what it means to be an indigenous-serving and indigenous-centered institution" where "Native Hawaiians thrive, traditional Hawaiian values and knowledge are embraced, and UH scholarship and service advance all Native Hawaiians and Hawai'i" (University of Hawai'i, 2023).

Model Indigenous-Serving Institution

In 2012, UH established a task force to develop a plan to create a "model indigenous-serving" institution. This initiative aimed to address the higher educational needs of Native Hawaiians at UH. The resulting task force report, the Hawai'i Papa O Ke Ao Report (HPOKA), provides a framework for creating a "model indigenous-serving institution." The goal was for each of the ten University of Hawai'i System campuses to utilize this report to "create individual plans that are respectful of each campus and the communities they serve" (University of Hawai'i, 2012, p. 4).

The HPOKA Report outlines eight characteristics, or markers, of a "model indigenous-serving institution in Hawai'i":

1. Hawaiian enrollment is at parity with Hawaiians in the Hawai'i state population.
2. Hawaiian students are performing at parity with non-Hawaiians.
3. Qualified Native Hawaiian faculty are employed in all disciplines at all campuses in the University system.
4. Native Hawaiian values are included in its decision-making and practices.
5. Native Hawaiians hold leadership roles in the University's administration.

6. The University of Hawai'i is the foremost authority on Native Hawaiian scholarship.
7. The University is responsive to the needs of the Hawaiian community and, with community input, implements programs to address the needs of Native Hawaiians and other underrepresented groups.
8. The University fosters and promotes Hawaiian culture and language at all its campuses. (p. 4)

Both the overarching UH system and UH Community Colleges (UHCC) strategic direction documents include similar language about creating a “model indigenous-serving institution” (University of Hawai'i Strategic Directions, 2015-2021, Version 2.0, 2018 Update; University of Hawai'i Community Colleges Strategic Directions, 2015-2021). The goals and recommendations of the HPOKA Report support the above characteristics of a “model indigenous-serving institution” in three thematic areas: Leadership Development, Community Engagement, and Hawaiian Language and Cultural Parity (University of Hawai'i, 201). The Leadership Development theme focuses on student and employee leadership, faculty and staff stewardship, and institutional decision-making. The Community Engagement theme reinforces the commitment to anchor the educational enterprise in responsibilities to the University's and the community's collaborative partnerships. Finally, the Hawaiian Culture and Language Parity theme seeks to increase access to learning the language and culture of the Indigenous people of Hawai'i.

As one of UH's ten campuses, Leeward Community College (Leeward CC) also acknowledges its commitment to Native Hawaiians in its mission and aims to support UH's aspiration of becoming a “model indigenous-serving” institution (Leeward Community College, 2023). Leeward CC seeks to incorporate Native Hawaiian knowledge and perspectives into its educational and institutional approaches and environment as a core element of its strategic planning process and mission. As a qualifying MSI, the College has a long history of supporting Native Hawaiian students, receiving millions of dollars in federal grant funds. Leeward CC is seeking other ways to increase enrollment, persistence, and completion of Native Hawaiian students and to improve the experience of Native Hawaiian employees at the College.

Sense of Belonging

According to the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, a sense of belonging, which is a psychological sense of connection and acceptance in one's community, leads to positive academic dispositions and academic performance and success (e.g., learning, persistence, and degree completion) (Museus et al., 2016; Museus et al., 2018). The CECE model posits that external factors such as employment, family, and pre-college characteristics such as academic preparation and demographics impact individual experiences and college success and suggests that campuses that meaningfully engage students' cultural identities lead to a greater sense of belonging, self-efficacy, persistence, and probability of success, particularly for students of color (Kiyama et al., 2015; Museus & Yi, 2015; Museus & Smith, 2016; Museus et al., 2017). Table 1 provides a summary of the CECE model's two categories, nine indicators, and their definitions.

Table 1. Categories and Indicators of the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment Model

Categories	Indicators
Cultural Relevance The degree to which students' campus environment is relevant to their cultural identity	<i>Cultural familiarity</i> - Opportunities to engage with faculty, staff, and peers who understand their cultural background <i>Culturally relevant knowledge</i> - The degree to which students can learn and exchange knowledge about their cultural communities <i>Cultural community services</i> - Opportunities for students to positively contribute to their communities <i>Cross-cultural engagement</i> - Meaningful interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds <i>Cultural validation</i> - The extent to which students feel their cultural identities, knowledge, and backgrounds are valued
Cultural Responsiveness How campus programs, practices, and support systems respond to the needs of culturally diverse students	<i>Collectivist orientations</i> - How a campus culture is collaborative and group-oriented instead of individually-oriented and competitive <i>Humanized environments</i> - Places where students can connect with faculty and staff <i>Proactive philosophies</i> - Ways faculty and staff make information accessible and meet students where they are <i>Holistic support</i> - How students access various supports and support systems

Purpose

This qualitative, single-site case study investigated the extent to which faculty, staff, and students felt a sense of belonging at Leeward CC and their perceptions of Native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiian culture. Then, Native Hawaiian faculty and staff were asked about how the College could increase sense of belonging, be more welcoming to Native Hawaiian students and employees, and contribute to the institution's aspiration to become a "model indigenous-serving" institution. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do Leeward CC's faculty, staff, and students perceive a sense of belonging and Native Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture in their campus environment?
2. How do Leeward CC's Native Hawaiian employees envision a "model-Indigenous serving" Leeward CC?
3. How could Leeward CC appropriately implement these characteristics?

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks guided this study: the Indigenous research paradigm and Kanaka 'Ōiwi/Kanaka Critical Theory. An Indigenous research paradigm is grounded in Indigenous ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological suppositions, which centralizes collectivism through relationality and is undergirded by responsibility and a reciprocal relationship with one's community (Salis Reyes, 2019). The primary objectives of this study were to investigate the sense of belonging among

Leeward CC's students and employees and explore perceptions of Native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiian culture on its campuses. As a Native Hawaiian researcher, it is essential to uphold the core attributes and ethics of the Native Hawaiian culture when conducting research. This includes seeking permission, feedback, and support from Native Hawaiian representatives and clearly defining the study's intentions before beginning any research activities.

Kanaka 'Ōiwi Critical Race Theory ('ŌiwiCrit) (Wright & Balutski, 2016) and Kanaka Critical Theory (KanakaCrit) (Salis Reyes, 2019) have foundations in Critical Race Theory (CRT), which posits that racism is endemic to society. However, 'ŌiwiCrit and KanakaCrit expand and tailor the principles of CRT to center Kanaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) epistemology to address the persistent effects of colonization and occupation impacting Kānaka (Native Hawaiians) (Cristobal, 2018). 'ŌiwiCrit and KanakaCrit are emerging theoretical frameworks that provide insight into Kānaka experiences in higher education. They offer perspectives on the various efforts to decode colonial experiences in state-run minority-serving institutions unique to Kānaka Māoli. For example, institutions like the UH aspire to be "model indigenous-serving institutions" (University of Hawai'i, 2012). 'ŌiwiCrit and KanakaCrit's framework helps build a context around the need for such aspirations and point out some of the problematic truths inherent in such a discourse. Finally, this study used the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model as the primary conceptual framework for the data collection.

Methodology

This study used two data collection methods: surveys and interviews. The survey gathered the feelings and thoughts of faculty, staff, and students about their sense of belonging related to their home cultures and their perceptions of Native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiian culture at Leeward CC (see research question 1). Interviews explored how Leeward CC has responded to the needs of its Native Hawaiian employees and students and provided insights into perspectives, needs, key policies, and practices that promote the creation of a "model indigenous-serving" institution (see research questions 2 and 3). Figure 1 illustrates this study's purpose, related research questions, data collection tools, and intended target populations.

Survey data provided a general overview of Leeward CC's position concerning the CECE model's five cultural relevance indicators. The interviews provided more detailed insights into the existing activities, structures, and unique perspectives and needs of Native Hawaiian employees concerning the CECE model's four cultural responsiveness indicators. Figure 2 is a matrix of the survey statements categorized by their corresponding CECE cultural relevance indicator(s).

Figure 1. Overview of Purpose, Research Questions, Tools, and Target Population

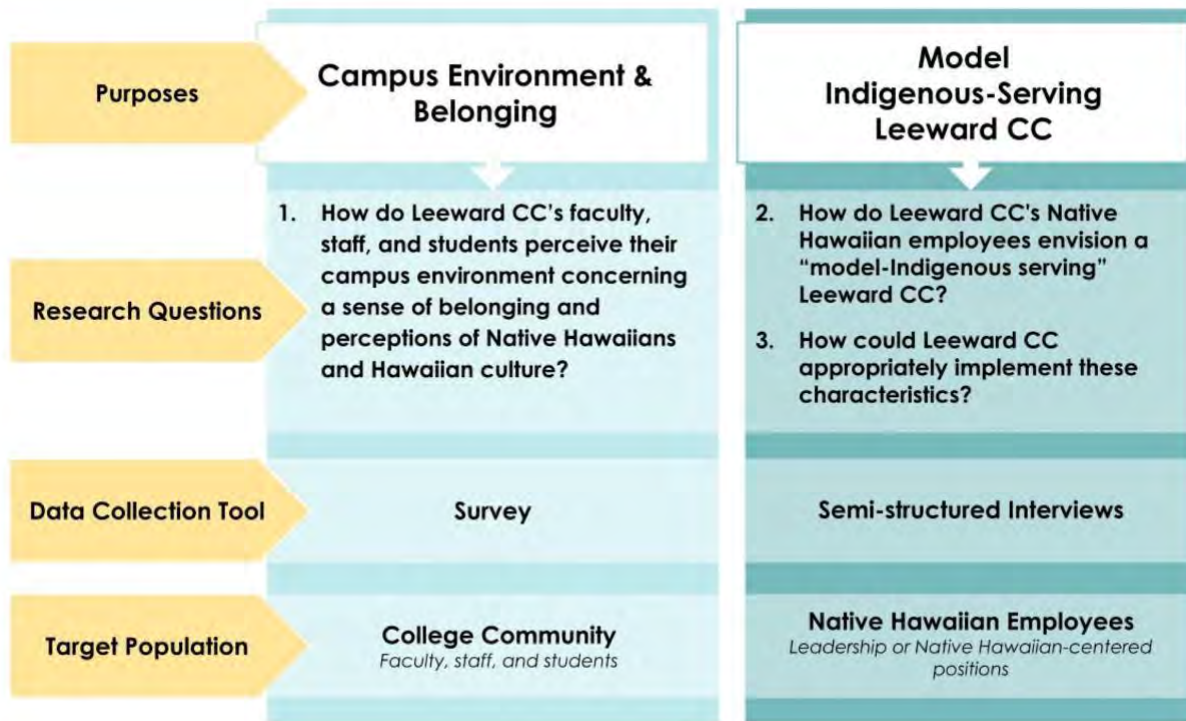
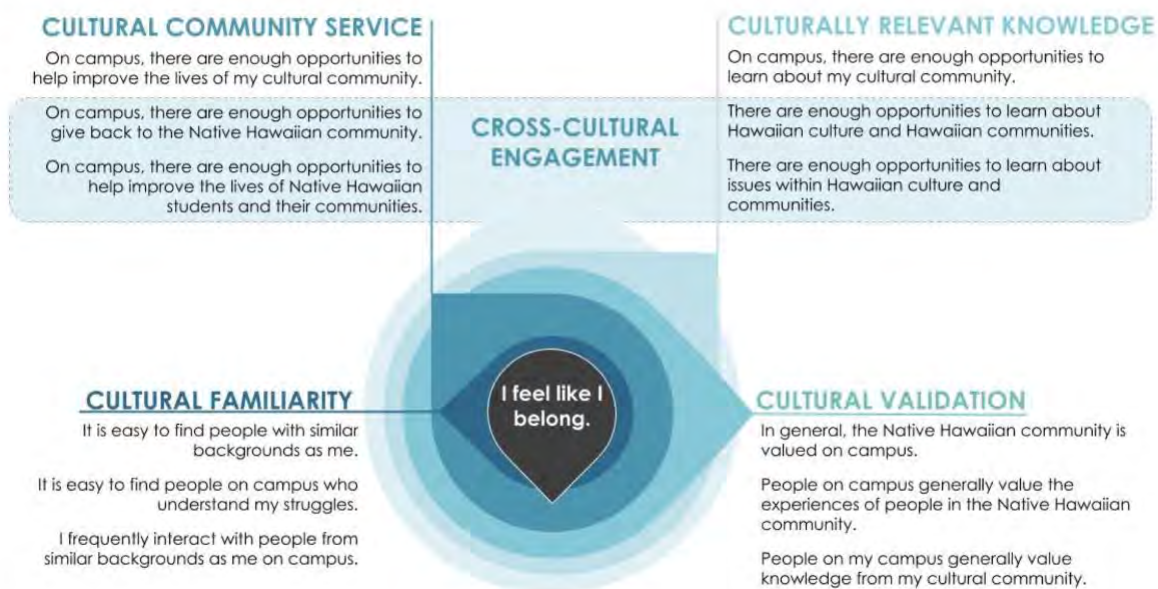


Figure 2. Survey Statements by CECE Cultural Relevance Indicators



The survey presented faculty, staff, and students of Leeward CC with 14 statements that addressed one or more of the five cultural relevance indicators of the CECE model: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community services, cross-cultural engagement, and cultural validation (Museus & Smith, 2016). Participants were asked to agree or disagree with each statement based on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This study interpreted the selection of (1) as strongly disagree, (2) as disagree, (3) as neutral, (4) as agree, and (5) as strongly agree.

Interviewees were recruited via a personal inquiry from the investigator based on two criteria: (a) being Native Hawaiian employees of Leeward CC and (b) occupying leadership positions, working directly with Native Hawaiian students, or working on projects or activities directly linked to Native Hawaiian students or employees. Each interview question corresponded to research question #2 or #3. Table 2 shows the study's research questions and their related interview questions.

Unit of Analysis

Leeward Community College provides educational services to various communities in the north, west, and central districts of the island of O'ahu, representing about 30% of Hawaii's total population (Leeward Community College, 2018, p.17). The College has two instructional sites: 1) the Pu'uloa campus, which sits in the moku (district) of 'Ewa, the ahupua'a (sub-district) of Waiawa, overlooking the harbor of Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), and 2) the Wai'anae-Moku Education Center in the moku of Wai'anae (Leeward Community College, 2018). Leeward CC's service also includes the central and northern districts of the moku of Waialua. Figure 3 shows Leeward CC's two instructional sites.

Table 2. Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
2. How do Leeward CC's Native Hawaiian employees envision a "model-indigenous serving" Leeward CC?	1. What is your definition of a "model indigenous-serving" institution? 2. What do you think a model indigenous-serving Leeward CC would look like?
3. How could Leeward CC appropriately and effectively implement these characteristics?	3. What activities, practices, or policies do you see in your area currently reflect that vision? 4. What kinds of resources or support would you need in your area to better serve Native Hawaiian students? 5. What policies or practices make helping Native Hawaiian students difficult? 6. What are two things that would improve your experience at Leeward CC as a Native Hawaiian? 7. What is one thing that would indicate to you that Leeward is on the right track to becoming an indigenous-serving institution?

Figure 3. *Leeward Community College Service Area, Instructional Sit*

In spring 2023, Leeward CC was the largest community college by enrollment in the University of Hawai'i system with 5,886 students (University of Hawai'i Institutional Research, Analysis, and Planning Office, n.d.). About 32% of enrolled students are in general or pre-professional areas, 21% are in career or technical fields, 23% are unclassified, and 25% are based on other campuses while partially enrolled (ibid). Over three-quarters of students are enrolled part-time, and 26.5% are of Native Hawaiian descent (ibid). Table 3 lists select student characteristics for Leeward CC students enrolled in spring 2023.

Table 3. *Select student characteristics at Leeward CC, Spring 2023*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Total enrollment	5,886	100%
College/Division		
General & Pre-professional	1,880	31.9%
Career & Technical Education	1,238	21%
Unclassified	1,328	22.6%
Not Home-based at Leeward CC	1,440	24.5%
Attendance status		
Full-time students	1,413	24.0%
Part-time students	4,473	76.0%
Native Hawaiian or part-Native Hawaiian ancestry	1,559	26.5%

Note. "Not-Home-based at Leeward CC" students seek degrees from other campuses but have chosen to take one or more courses at Leeward CC.

Leeward CC is the University of Hawai'i Community College's second-largest employer, with 402 employees. About 68% are full and part-time instructional and non-instructional faculty such as counselors. About 17% are Administrative, Professional, and Technical (APT), such as academic support, IT, and physical plant management.

About 14% of employees occupy civil service positions such as clerical, security, and janitorial staff. Leeward CC also has an executive staff of seven. Table 4 shows the selected characteristics of employees at Leeward CC.

Table 4. Select employee characteristics at Leeward CC, Fall 2022

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Total employees	402	100%
Full-time	318	79.1%
Part-time	84	20.9%
Faculty	272	67.7%
Instructional	126	31.3%
<i>Native Hawaiian Ancestry*</i>	11	8.7%
Non-instructional	38	9.5%
Lecturer	108	26.9%
APT	67	16.7%
Civil Service	56	14.0%
Executive	7	1.7%

*Ancestry data for non-instructional faculty, lecturers, APT, Civil Service, and Executive positions are not publicly available.

Researcher Positionality

Researchers must be acutely aware of their identity, opinions, values, beliefs, and social background because they inherently impact their methodological and analytical decisions (Manohar et al., 2017; Holmes, 2020). Such awareness is especially crucial when conducting cross-cultural, ethnographic, or other sensitive research (Manohar et al., 2017; Holmes, 2020). A researcher's positionality is informed through a reflexive examination of their ontological and epistemological views, colored by their values and beliefs, and shaped by fixed aspects such as gender, ethnicity, or location. (Holmes, 2020). Here, I present my positionality concerning the study, its participants, and the research process.

I am an Indigenous Native Hawaiian woman born and raised in Hawai'i. My journey has been challenging, as I have navigated two worlds and overcome cognitive and cultural dissonance. The Hawai'i I live in now is not the same Hawai'i I learned about in grade school. The true history of Hawai'i seems perpetually hidden under a thin veneer of sweet-smelling garlands and a long, drawn-out "Alooooooha!" I still struggle to shake off the remnants of colonialism, as it is not always easy to persevere when one is often treated like a stranger in one's own home. Native Hawaiians exist in two worlds: one world that values only our marketability and the other held hostage by that demand.

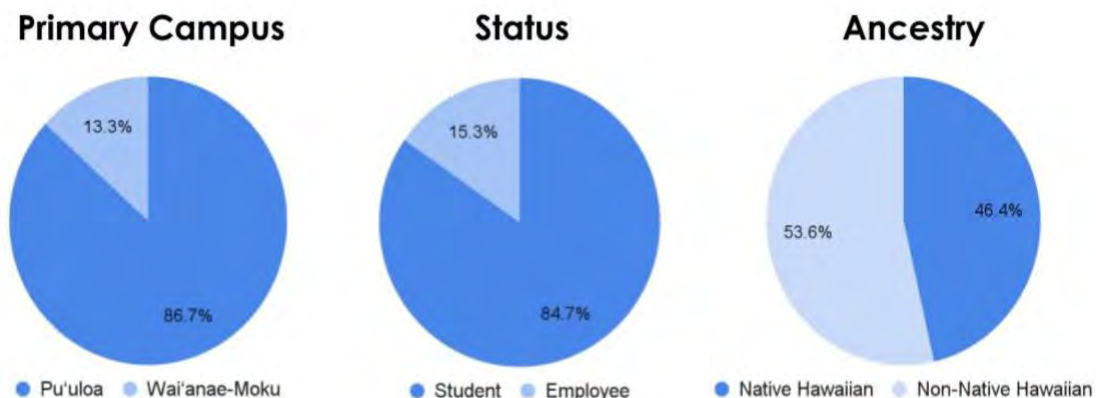
Despite this, I accept my kuleana, my responsibility, to survive and thrive so that those who come after me can progress further than I can imagine.

As a senior faculty member at Leeward CC, I find great fulfillment in my work as an educator. In my research, I must adhere to the university system's professional standards as well as Native Hawaiian cultural expectations and norms. For example, if I were studying a particular Native Hawaiian community, I would first visit the area kūpuna (elders) to explain my research intentions and ask permission. Therefore, one of my initial steps was to present my research proposal to the Pūko'a no nā 'Ewa Council ('Ewa Council), which represents Native Hawaiian employees and students on campus and serves as a recommending and advisory body on issues related to Native Hawaiian language, culture, history, and other matters. Seeking permission and support from the Council before starting my research was crucial as they were both the participants and beneficiaries of my study. Ultimately, my goal was to contribute to the dialogue and assist Leeward CC in becoming a "model indigenous-serving" institution.

Findings

There were 196 participants: 190 survey respondents and six interviewees. The anonymous survey was open to all employees and students of Leeward CC and distributed using purposeful snowball sampling. Interviewees were Native Hawaiian employees of Leeward CC occupied leadership positions, worked directly with Native Hawaiian students, or on projects or activities directly linked to Native Hawaiian students or employees. Figure 4 shows select participant characteristics.

Figure 4. *Participant Select Characteristics*

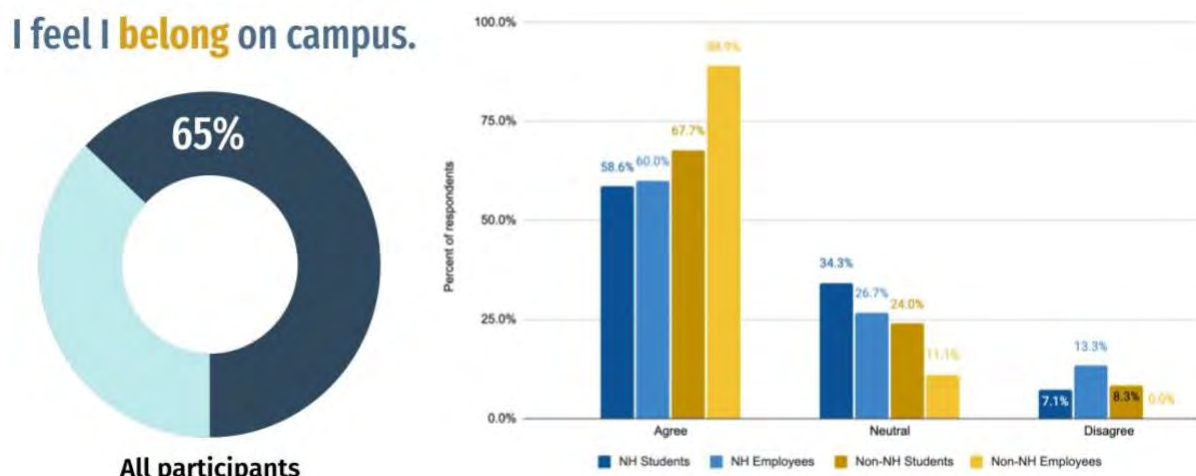


About 87% of participants identified Pu'uloa as their primary campus. About 13% reported that the Wai'anae-Moku Education Center is their primary campus. Over 87% of the respondents were students, and 68 (41%) were of Native Hawaiian ancestry. There were 24 (12.6%) employee respondents, and 14 (58%) were of Native Hawaiian ancestry.

The survey aimed to determine whether the students and employees at Leeward CC felt a sense of belonging on campus. Participants were asked to respond to

statements related to various aspects of a sense of belonging, culminating in the statement, “I feel like I belong on campus.” The results showed that while most participants felt a sense of belonging, there were significant differences between Native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian students and employees. Figure 5 highlights this disparity by illustrating the overall and disaggregated results from the statement, “I feel I belong on campus.”

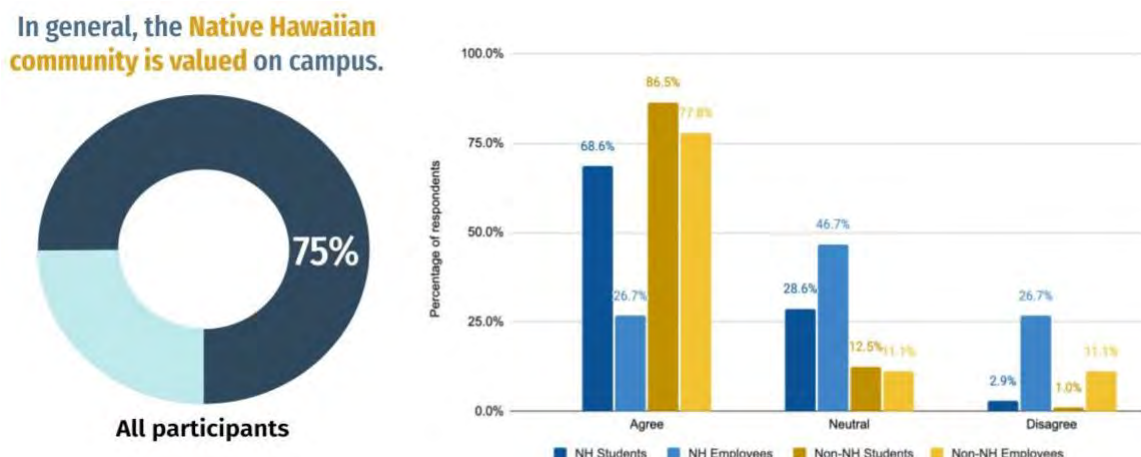
Figure 5. Overall and Disaggregated Results for the Survey Question, “I feel I belong on campus.”



The data showed that approximately 65% of all respondents felt they belonged on campus. Almost 70% of non-Native Hawaiians and about 59% of Native Hawaiians agreed. While this percentage represents the majority of each population, the data shows that 17% more non-Native Hawaiians than Native Hawaiians agreed. Slightly more employees (70.8%) than students (63.9%) felt a sense of belonging. Disaggregating the data further revealed that non-Native Hawaiian employees had the highest sense of belonging (88.9%), and Native Hawaiian employees had the lowest (60.0%) – a difference of almost 30%.

Native Hawaiian employees and students are also less likely to feel valued as a community and less satisfied than their non-Native Hawaiian counterparts with opportunities to learn about Native Hawaiian culture and communities or to improve or give back to the Native Hawaiian community. When presented with the statement, “In general, the Native Hawaiian community is valued on campus,” 75% of all respondents felt that people on campus valued knowledge and experiences from Hawaiian culture and communities. However, when disaggregated by population, significantly more non-Native Hawaiian (about 80%) than Native Hawaiian (about 58%) respondents agreed with this statement. Similarly, more students (about 73%) than employees (50%) agreed with this statement. Moreover, when further disaggregated, nearly 90% of non-native Hawaiian employees and only about 27% of Native Hawaiian employees agreed. Figure 6 presents the overall and disaggregated results for the statement, “In general, the Native Hawaiian community is valued on campus.”

Figure 6. Overall and Disaggregated Results for the Survey Question, “In general, the Native Hawaiian community is valued on campus.”



Similarly, interviewees reported a tenuous sense of belonging, noting that although they generally feel comfortable on campus, their comfort and sense of belonging are context-specific and often changed depending on location or surrounding personnel. Interviewees saw a “model indigenous-serving” Leeward CC as one that prioritizes and integrates the indigenous people, mindsets, environments, and collective wellness in decision-making, leadership, and service to the surrounding community. However, interviewees stressed that individual efforts without institutional support are unsustainable, and the vision of a “model indigenous-serving” Leeward CC is challenging without coordination, permanent positions, consistent funding, and a more holistic approach to student support.

Interviewee responses were analyzed using a combination of deductive, inductive, and in-vivo coding and arranged into three emerging themes: (a) defining a “model indigenous-serving” Leeward CC, (b) existing policies, activities, and practices that reflect this vision, (c) resourcing needs to pave the way towards a “model indigenous-serving” institution. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of these themes based on the responses to the survey and interview questions.

According to the interviewees, a “model indigenous-serving” institution prioritizes and integrates the Indigenous people, mindsets, environments, and collective wellness in decision-making, leadership, and service to the surrounding community. The following is a list of characteristics of a “model indigenous-serving” institution compiled from interviewees' responses. A “model indigenous-serving” institution:

1. Cultivates a sense of belonging and safety for employees and students.
2. Engages Hawai'i's Indigenous people at all levels.
3. Integrates a Native Hawaiian mindset throughout and across the campuses.
4. Creates an environment that reflects both its location and history.
5. Integrates cultural activities and curricular elements across disciplines.
6. Utilizes community resources such as elders and cultural practitioners.

I expand on each point below.

Cultivates a sense of belonging and a safe place for employees and students. The survey found that two-thirds of respondents felt a sense of belonging at

Leeward CC. However, Native Hawaiians reported feeling less comfortable on campus than their non-Native Hawaiian peers. All interviewees expressed a sense of belonging, although this varied depending on the situation. When faced with discomfort, interviewees reported feeling confident enough as professionals to engage in the discussion and productively present their perspectives on the matter. However, interviewees were also concerned that students might not always have the same confidence. This distinction highlights the importance of creating an environment that fosters belonging and safety for all cultural groups, as this is integral to building connections and is difficult to achieve if individuals feel ostracized or excluded. It also underlines the CECE model's emphasis on collectivist cultural orientations and creating humanized educational environments that foster connections.

Engages Hawai'i's Indigenous People at All Levels. To create a "model indigenous-serving" institution, it is crucial to have a Native Hawaiian presence on campus as a foundation, including Native Hawaiian employees and students. Engaging Native Hawaiians at all levels is also vital, and it can involve experts in Native Hawaiian culture, agriculture, aquaculture, architecture, and the healing arts. This sentiment is directly related to the humanized educational environment indicator, as it is impossible to foster connections with the Native Hawaiian community without their presence in academic (educational) spaces.

Integrates a Native Hawaiian mindset throughout the campuses. All interviewees emphasized the importance of having a Native Hawaiian mindset. According to their responses, a Native Hawaiian mindset involves recognizing ancestral knowledge, prioritizing collective understanding and wellness, sanctifying knowledge, and kuleana - a sense of responsibility rather than entitlement. It also involves a shared understanding of the importance of incorporating indigenous culture into daily experiences and supporting students through an 'ohana system. This mindset encompasses all four cultural responsiveness indicators by highlighting collectivism, connecting with peers and students, educating others about Native Hawaiian culture, and providing a holistic support system for academic, social, and mental health.

Create an environment that reflects its location and history. Interviewees expressed disappointment with the lack of place-based character and history on both the Pu'u'loa and Wai'anae-Moku campuses, but they also suggested solutions to create a more thoughtful environment. For instance, they suggested cultivating more green spaces to showcase the College's native and endemic plant collection and creating interactive living labs to help students experience the plants in various ways, such as for food or art. Additionally, several interviewees recommended integrating Indigenous structures like a hale pili (house thatched with pili grass) and hālau wa'a (open-sided canoe house) into each campus as 21st-century learning environments that serve students and employees. Renaming campus buildings was another popular suggestion, with interviewees advocating for building names and signage that reflect each campus's historical and cultural significance. Several interviewees also emphasized incorporating Native Hawaiian historical and cultural references into campus decor and artwork to make Leeward CC a Native Hawaiian place of learning. In short, although changing the foundational architecture may not be feasible, other ways exist to infuse the campuses with history.

Integrate cultural activities and curricular elements across disciplines. The College should prioritize integrating Native Hawaiian culture-based professional development, activities, and curricular elements across disciplines and campuses. One interviewee envisions a culturally vibrant campus that incorporates cultural activities and curricular elements across disciplines while emphasizing increasing access to relevant information for both employees and students. For instance, Leeward CC one interviewee suggested that Leeward could be a leader in the emerging field of Indigenous data science, the study of data, information, and knowledge about Indigenous individuals, collectives, entities, lifeways, cultures, lands, and resources to find patterns in data and make meaningful, data-driven conclusions and predictions (Rainie et al., 2019).

Another interviewee talked about project-based and hands-on activities that teach students about the history of the 'āina. Cultural activities among employees could also be integrated and held in spaces such as the Kīpuka Native Hawaiian Center at Pu'uloa. For example, faculty and staff can participate in the Kawaimanomo Native Hawaiian professional development series to learn about the Native Hawaiian language, culture, history, and worldviews. Widespread integration of culture-based activities and professional development would provide multiple access points to Native Hawaiian culture.

Effectively utilize community resources such as elders and practitioners. Interviewees spoke about the potential of utilizing elders, cultural experts, and practitioners within our community. For example, one interviewee suggested involving our kūpuna (elders, ancestors) to support our students. Another interviewee emphasized the significance of recruiting employees who live in the college's service area. Students see employees as part of their community, fostering more personal connections and increasing a sense of belonging. This approach aligns with the collectivist cultural orientation and humanized educational environment CECE indicators. It fosters connections on and off campus by involving the community and humanizing our surroundings.

Discussion and Interpretations

The survey revealed that many participants felt a sense of belonging in their campus environment. However, there were substantial disparities when viewed from different perspectives. The results indicated that Native Hawaiians were less likely to feel valued, included, or satisfied with opportunities to learn about or contribute to Native Hawaiian culture and communities than non-Native Hawaiians. These findings support the core premise of the CECE model and are associated with presuppositions outlined in KanakaCrit and 'ŌiwiCrit theories. Furthermore, they suggest indigenizing the academy to foster a sense of belonging may be an effective solution.

Native Hawaiian students and employees at Leeward CC face complex external factors and conflicting expectations. KanakaCrit and 'ŌiwiCrit theories suggest that their experiences in higher education are unique, complex, and at times liminal due to the intersectionality of their identity and the impact of colonialism and occupation. These individuals often encounter expectations and actions that do not align with their worldview, particularly on college campuses constructed on what was once Native Hawaiian national territory. By acknowledging these factors, recognizing the significance of different knowledge systems, and working to dismantle structures that

perpetuate colonialism, we can help to address these misaligned expectations and confront the consequences of colonial occupation on Native Hawaiian people.

“Indigenizing the academy” refers to the meaningful incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into all levels of the academy’s understanding of knowledge. This approach challenges the colonial powers’ systemic domination of knowledge and communication. To become a “model indigenous-serving” institution, universities like the University of Hawai‘i must embrace Native Hawaiian knowledge and confront the cultural and racial genocide perpetuated by deeply ingrained systems of colonial governance, in which higher education played a significant role.

Many colleges and universities strive to empower Indigenous scholars and communities and close achievement gaps by making their systems and structures more inclusive. However, they tend to struggle to progress beyond conditional inclusion, selective engagement, and tokenism (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016). UH aims to address its colonial history and become a “model indigenous-serving institution,” as one of the ten UH system campuses, Leeward CC shares similar aspirations. It is crucial to question where the University of Hawai‘i and Leeward CC stand on this continuum of interpretations.

Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) identify three interpretations of indigenizing higher education: Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation indigenization, and decolonial indigenization. Indigenous inclusion prioritizes increasing the number of Indigenous students, faculty, and staff in academia. This approach aligns with U.S. federal requirements for Minority Serving Institutions, which mandate a minimum number of Native Hawaiian students with demonstrated financial need. The University of Hawai‘i campuses have long qualified for MSI funds and have used them to support Native Hawaiian students and each of the UH campuses. Many of the University’s goals and objectives in the HPOKA Report reflect this interpretation, as they aim to increase enrollment, retention, and completion rates for Native Hawaiian students and recruit qualified Native Hawaiian personnel. Additionally, interviewees have worked on grants that assess the success of increasing recruitment, persistence, or completion rates for Native Hawaiian students.

Reconciliation indigenization aims to broaden the consensus on knowledge, reconcile Indigenous and European/American-derived knowledges, and establish appropriate relationships between academic institutions and Indigenous communities. This interpretation requires a thoughtful examination of higher education’s colonial nature and individual institutions’ intentions. The HPOKA Report shares some goals with this interpretation as it seeks to go beyond numbers and address underlying policies and system processes by incorporating Native Hawaiian knowledges into institutional decision-making.

Decolonial indigenization is a complete overhaul of knowledge that aims to balance power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in higher education. The goal is to create a new and dynamic academy. However, neither the University of Hawai‘i nor Leeward CC have explored this approach. This study indicates that Native Hawaiian students and employees struggle to feel a sense of belonging or safety on campus. The cultural discontinuity of being Indigenous in a non-Indigenous institution continues to be a challenge for Native Hawaiians.

Recommendations

Previous studies indicate that a sense of belonging is crucial for student success, especially for students of color (Museus et al., 2018). This study revealed a gap in the sense of belonging between Native Hawaiian and non-Native Hawaiian students and employees at Leeward CC. This study found that Native Hawaiian employees had the lowest rates of belonging and satisfaction in several areas. The interviewees attributed this to the lack of adequate financial and human resource support for Native Hawaiian-focused programs for both students and employees. The findings suggest several recommendations for the College. First, the authors recommend that LCC create a dedicated position to coordinate current and future Native Hawaiian-focused programs, grants, or activities and advocate for Native Hawaiian affairs at Leeward CC. This position would engage with Native Hawaiians at all college and service community levels.

Second, conduct research to pinpoint policies, activities, or practices that promote inclusiveness at the college. Research activities should incorporate Western and Indigenous sources of data better to understand the needs of Native Hawaiian students and employees, and reference the goals and objectives of the HPOKA report as guidelines, carefully integrating the voice of the campus. Moreover, researchers should be mindful of Indigenous data sovereignty, which involves various legal, ethical, and practical considerations related to how data is stored, owned, accessed, and used in relation to intellectual property rights.

Third, support existing employee professional development programs for employees and determine means to provide financial and administrative security. For example, the Kawaimanomano Native Hawaiian professional series offers a way to learn about the Native Hawaiian language, culture, history, and worldviews. However, this program is currently supported by a temporary grant. This, and similar programs, should be institutionalized.

Finally, integrate Native Hawaiian culture, cultural activities, and curricular elements across all disciplines. However, most curricular development incorporating Native Hawaiian ideas and approaches is limited to Hawaiian Studies, Hawaiian Language, and Pacific Islands Studies disciplines. Similarly, the Kīpuka Native Hawaiian Center at Pu‘uloa is the primary organizer of Native Hawaiian culture-based activities. Integrating Native Hawaiian culture can be achieved by providing material and financial support for curricular development and cultural-based student activities and programs.

Conclusion

Access to higher education is crucial for Indigenous peoples to achieve economic stability, meaningful civic engagement, and overall well-being. However, centuries of imperialism, colonization, and racism have created significant barriers that make it harder for Indigenous peoples to obtain a higher education. The fundamental principles within efforts to indigenize the academy is twofold: first, acknowledging responsibility for building these barriers and second, working to eliminate them by integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into institutional structures and policies. These efforts seek to humanize and validate Indigenous systems in the eyes of the academy, transforming paradigms and knowledge systems to encompass Indigenous ideas and approaches.

The University of Hawai‘i is the only public institution of higher education in Hawai‘i. It has committed itself to addressing the higher educational needs of Native

Hawaiians, the Indigenous people of Hawai'i. UH aspires to be a “model indigenous-serving” institution and has charged each campus to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems and concepts into their institutional structures and policies. The campus at the heart of this study, Leeward Community College, has taken up this charge.

This study suggests that Native Hawaiian students and employees at Leeward CC face unique challenges due to the intersectionality of their identity, the impact of colonialism and occupation on higher education systems in general, and misperceptions of the needs of the Native Hawaiian community specifically. Further, Native Hawaiian students and employees experience Leeward CC differently than non-Native Hawaiian counterparts. They are less likely to feel at home because while Leeward CC sits on a Hawaiian island, its campuses, structures, and institutional policies do not necessarily reflect that reality. Native Hawaiian employees felt this disconnect most keenly. While passionate about building a “model indigenous-serving” Leeward CC, they also felt overburdened by the lack of substantive support and resources.

The findings underscore the importance of indigenizing the academy and incorporating Native Hawaiian knowledge and perspectives into all institutional levels. While the University of Hawai'i and Leeward CC have made progress in integrating strategies promoting Indigenous inclusion and reconciling its responsibility to Native Hawaiians, much work is still needed to create a new and dynamic academy that balances power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. By recognizing the significance of different knowledge systems and working to dismantle structures that perpetuate colonialism, and embracing Native Hawaiian knowledge, Leeward CC can help foster a sense of belonging and safety for Native Hawaiian students and employees on its campus.

The road to becoming a “model indigenous-serving” institution will be long and complex for both Leeward CC and the University of Hawai'i System. It is littered with the remnants of colonialism and occupation and obstructed by the difficulties that come with being a government-funded institution. As a Native Hawaiian employee of the College, I hope that Leeward CC will persevere on its journey and achieve its aspiration.

References

- Alfred, T., & Corntassel, J. (2005). Being indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism. *Government and Opposition*, 40(4), 597–614. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2005.00166.x>
- Boland, W., Gasman, M., Samayoa, A. C., & Bennett, D. (2019). The Effect of enrolling in Minority Serving Institutions on earnings compared to non-minority serving institutions: A college scorecard analysis. *Research in Higher Education*, 62(2), 121-150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09580-w>
- Cristobal, N. (2018). Kanaka Ōiwi Critical Race Theory: Historical and cultural ecological understanding of Kanaka Ōiwi education. *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, 7, 27-44. <https://doi.org/10.5195/contemp.2018.240>

- Gasman, M., Nguyen, T. H., & Conrad, C. F. (2015). Lives intertwined: A primer on the history and emergence of minority serving institutions. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 8(2), 120.
- Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218-227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382>
- Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. 1058 §312 (1965)
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-765/pdf/COMPS-765.pdf>
- Holmes, D. A. G. (2020). Researcher positionality - A consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research - A new researcher guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>
- Kiyama, J. M., Museus, S. D., & Vega, B. E. (2015). Cultivating campus environments to maximize success among Latino and Latina college students. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2015(172), 29-38. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20150>
- Leeward Community College. (2023). *Mission*. <https://www.leeward.hawaii.edu/about/>
- Louie, D. W., Poitras-Pratt, Y., Hanson, A. J., & Ottmann, J. (2017). Applying Indigenizing principles to decolonizing methodologies in university classrooms. *Articles Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 47(3), 16-33. doi:10.7202/1043236ar
- Manohar, N., Liamputtong, P., Bhole, S., & Arora, A. (2017). Researcher positionality in cross-cultural and sensitive research. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences* (pp. 1-15). Springer Nature Singapore. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5251-4_35
- Museus, S. D., & Yi, V. (2015). Rethinking student involvement and engagement: Cultivating culturally relevant and responsive contexts for campus participation. In D. Mitchell, Jr., K. M. Soria, E. A. Daniele, & J. A. Gibson (Eds.), *Student involvement and academic outcomes: Implications for diverse college student populations* (pp. 11-24). https://www.colorado.edu/odece/sites/default/files/attached-files/museus_yi_2015_rethinking_involvement_and_engagement_stamped.pdf
- Museus, S. D., and Smith, E. J. (2016). *The culturally engaging campus environments model and survey: A report on new tools for assessing campus environments and diverse college student outcomes (executive summary)*. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). https://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/CECE_Report_EXEC_SUM_DOWNLOAD.pdf
- Museus, S. D., Zhang, D., and Kim, M. J. (2016). Developing and evaluating the culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) scale: An examination of content and construct validity. *Research in Higher Education*, 57(6), 768-793. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-015-9405-8>
- Museus, S. D., Yi, V., and Saelua, N. (2017). The impact of culturally engaging campus environments on sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 40(2), 187-215. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2017.0001>
- Museus, S. D., Yi, V., and Saelua, N. (2018). How culturally engaging campus environments influence sense of belonging in College: An examination of

- differences between White students and students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(4), 467-483. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000069>
- Pidgeon, M. (2016). More than a checklist: Meaningful Indigenous inclusion in higher education. *Social Inclusion*, 4(1), 77-91. <https://doi.org/dx.doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i1.436>
- Rainie, S., Walter, M., Figueroa-Rodriguez, O., Walker, J., & Axelsson, P. (2019). Issues in open data - Indigenous data sovereignty. In T. Davies, S. Walker, M. Rubinstein, & F. Perini (Eds.), *The State of Open Data: Histories and Horizons* (pp. 300–319). African Books Collective. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.2677801
- Salis Reyes, N. A. (2019). “What am I doing to be a good ancestor?”: An indigenized phenomenology of giving back among native college graduates. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(3), 603-637. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218807180>
- Sarivaara, E., Maatta, K., & Uusiautti, S. (2013). Who is Indigenous? Definitions of Indigeneity. *Eurasian Multidisciplinary Forum*, 1, 379–388. <https://doi.org/https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=28f51fc98b0ab24527ced26b593ce747038b69c9#page=379>
- Simpson, L. R. (2004). Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of Indigenous knowledge. *American Indian Quarterly* 8(3), 373-384.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (3rd ed.). Zed Books Ltd.
- University of Hawai‘i. (2012). *Hawai‘i Papa o ke Ao report*. <https://www.hawaii.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/HPOKA-2012.pdf>
- University of Hawai‘i. (2023). *Strategic plan, 2023-2029*. https://www.hawaii.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/UH_Strategic_Plan_23-29.pdf
- University of Hawai‘i Institutional Research, Analysis, and Planning Office, n.d. *Daily student reports*. <https://data.hawaii.edu/#/home>
- Wright, E. K. & Balutski, B. J. N. (2016). *Ka ‘Ikena a ka Hawai‘i: Toward a Kanaka ‘Ōiwi critical race theory*. In K.-A R. K. N. Oliveira & E. K. Wright (Eds.), *Kanaka' Ōiwi methodologies: Mo‘olelo and metaphor* (pp. 72-85). University of Hawai‘i Press.