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/pacific/stories/2010/08/23/editorial1.html

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Hawaii needs an independent UH TIM School

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I am a 1974 graduate of the School of Travel Industry Management at the University of Hawaii Manoa.

I have been reading about Hawaii's economy and how to revive it in PBN. This is an election year, and I believe our leadership needs to come to grips with and acceptance of necessary support of the state's No. 1 industry — tourism. Every state in our nation supports its major industry by its state universities through an independent college or school devoted to that industry.

It's a fundamental axiom to support programs that work and TIM School's accomplishments, reputation and global outreach are well-established, especially in Hawaii's newly emerging tourism markets. This year, the TIM School is the program of choice for government officials from Abu Dhabi, Shanghai and Hainan Island. Visiting scholars from China are being invited to TIM next year to study how Hawaii can best accommodate the emerging Chinese market. Requests from China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore are continually flowing in.

Others have tried to duplicate the school's programs, but TIM is a unique program with a global competitive advantage. There is something very special about the TIM School in Hawaii due to its excellent programs, faculty expertise, location, Hawaii hospitality and reputation.

Any candidate who is running for office to lead this state on the road to economic recovery either in the governor's office or our Legislature must recognize that an independent TIM School is a matter of statewide concern. There cannot be any further administrative avoidance of the importance of this issue and its statewide importance by relegating it solely to the university administration or Department of Education who seem to wholly miss the point lately. That conflicts with the history and past efforts.

Over the years, the state Legislature has invested in the TIM School by granting funds for additional faculty positions and seed monies for the Center for Tourism Policy Studies, which has produced many externally funded applied tourism studies for Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, including a number of master plans.

The TIM School is one of the best-known name brands at UH with a distinguished record of accomplishments. In the late 1950s, Gov. John Quinn established the TIM School to educate leaders for the then-emerging tourism industry. At the time, Hawaii prevailed over Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore to establish this coveted program with the support of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Since then, every Hawaii governor and many other visionary leaders in government and UH have supported the TIM School, which eventually outgrew and separated from the business college two decades ago.

The TIM School is the oldest tourism education program in the region and the first to receive the PATA Gold Education Award. The United Nations World Tourism Organization ranks the TIM School as one of the top two tourism education programs in the U.S. and among the top eight in the world. In the past, the school was a regional tourism education and training center, but it now serves as an international strategic center for UNWTO.

As anticipated, the Asia Pacific region is now leading the world in tourism growth. The school has many distinguished alumni in Hawaii and abroad. The school's ability to maintain its hard-earned world-class reputation, relevance and position, however, is now being threatened by a proposal to submerge it under the Shidler College of Business.

Even more critical, the TIM School currently is being prevented from using its available resources to replace any permanent faculty positions. The school's request to fill only two out of five faculty vacancies is being denied, even though more than 100 UH Manoa faculty positions in other programs are currently being advertised.

Thus, UH Manoa is failing in its obligation to provide the best education possible that TIM students have paid for and deserve. The chancellor is also planning to take back any vacant positions and funds from all programs for reallocation in January 2011. This will further penalize TIM students, who receive relatively fewer tuition waivers and are the second fastest to graduate in spite of holding jobs and completing mandatory 800 hours of internships.

As the feeder program for managers in the largest industry in Hawaii, the TIM School provides quality education with the smallest faculty and budget of only \$1.8 million with the lowest instructional cost per student. Since TIM is the most efficient and cost-effective unit at UH Manoa, it means that TIM student tuitions are being unduly used to cover other costs.

A merger that eliminates the already well-established TIM deanship, exploits its resource efficiencies and dilutes its globally recognized curriculum is unwarranted and will be very difficult to restore once lost. Consider what is happening locally, nationally and internationally.

If UH succeeds in submerging the TIM School, this would relegate Hawaii to becoming the only state that does not support its major industry with a standalone college or school within its state university system. The other 49 states have more diversified economies. For Hawaii, especially the Neighbor Islands, tourism is the state's leading income-generating economic activity for the foreseeable future. The merger is counter to the UH's land grant mandate to support Hawaii's economy.

Tourism, the largest industry in the world, will rebound and the best way to prepare for the future is to keep the TIM School intact. The TIM B.S. and M.S. degrees are the preferred degree for employers in Hawaii's visitor industry with nearly 100 percent job placement for UH TIM graduates. The specialized service-based curriculum makes TIM graduates highly qualified for a broad range of service businesses, as well as in the hospitality, tourism and transportation industries.

Hawaii can best develop local managerial and leadership talent through an autonomous TIM School that can quickly respond to relevant changes in the field. Since the industry prefers to hire graduates with hospitality/tourism degrees, without a strong TIM program the alternative would be to go back to hiring graduates from Mainland universities like Cornell.

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