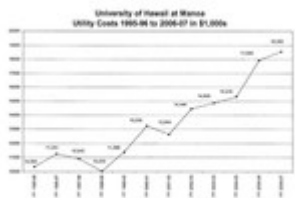

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Writing for a more energy-efficient university

By Alexandria Ham
 Ka Leo Staff Writer
 October 12, 2006

Graphic Provided by Kathy Cutshaw

Imagine how many improvements could be made at the University of Hawai'i with an extra \$20 million. This is about what the university will pay in utility costs this year, almost double the amount spent 10 years ago. As utility costs continue to rise, more student tuition dollars will be taken away from student services and facilities. This is money that is not available for the mission of the university, (the creation of new knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge) giving students less for their money every year.

Of course, the electric bill accounts for most of this expense. Hawai'i has the most expensive electricity in the country, and the rates continue to increase. The energy hike of 2004 '05 caught UH off guard, forcing it to appeal to the state legislature for an emergency allocation of funds to pay the bill. The request was honored, and the university was awarded a one-time allocation of \$3.3 million to help cover utility costs.

But the situation only became more dire the following academic year, 2005 - 06, resulting in UH returning to the legislators with a request for \$4.5 million. The legislature, however, declined this request, leaving the university with no choice but to reallocate money intended for student services and facilities.

UH is aware of the disconnect between the sustainable values it teaches and the inefficient building in which these lessons are transmitted. The problem preventing the university from practicing what it preaches is the exorbitant cost of modernization. The good news is that the chancellor is deeply committed to sustainability, as it is one of the main orientations of the university.

Therefore, in response to the inordinate energy costs, the chancellor has organized an energy summit to take place on Oct. 24 at the East-West Center Keoni Auditorium from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. At this summit, the chancellor will give an overview of the current problem.

The hope is that this summit will serve as a problem-solving forum working towards a solution to the university's energy problem. Toward the end of the summit, experts invited from the mainland will share the means they used to achieve energy savings in their host institutions.

UH will also join forces with Hawaiian Electric Company (HECO) to cut costs and utilize new technologies. According to Kathy Cutshaw, acting UH vice chancellor for administration, finance and operations, this partnership between HECO and UH is designed to "use their expertise and knowledge, along with our expertise and knowledge, to make visible changes."

The morning session of the summit is open to the public. Panel discussions will be open to the audience. The afternoon session, closed to the public, is dedicated to developing a campus energy plan, detailing where the university wants to be, what it needs to do to get there and what barriers may arise along the path to achieving this ideal. The goal is to come out with a new policy for the Mānoa campus.

Ideally, this plan will affirm the role of UH as an institute of higher learning at the forefront of change, providing an example for the rest of the state. A series of demonstrative projects will accompany this policy to show what the university can do with the technology currently available. For example, using a form of air conditioning used on Coconut Island could potentially cut those facilities' air-conditioning costs in half, saving the university about \$150,000 a year. On a smaller scale, switching out the lighting in the Campus Center with energy-efficient bulbs could incur a yearly savings of over \$5,000.

The other major issue that will be addressed at the energy summit is getting the Mānoa campus its own energy office, for which the university has requested funding from the legislature. This office would be in charge of getting the usage from each of the buildings and setting up a Web site for education. They would work as an energy accountant, monitoring the implemented changes and projects to make sure they are performing at maximum capacity.

Although the energy summit is a commendable approach to maximizing intellectual resources by brainstorming on a problem, the real accomplishment in making the campus a pillar of sustainability will come from the formation of the energy office. This office will monitor and maintain all of the changes implemented by UH in its attempts to become more sustainable, enabling the university to run as efficiently as possible. And don't forget, staying on top of conserving energy translates into saving student tuition dollars for improving student services and facilities.

About the Writer

Alexandria is in the advanced stage of working on her dissertation proposal for a PhD degree in comparative philosophy. She has always been interested in issues relating to sustainability, and incorporates environmental ethics into her introduction to ethics course (Phil 101) here at UH. She has been teaching here for the past three years (logic, ethics and intro to philosophy). Alexandria's sustainability column appears every Thursday.



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