

2021 – 2022 MERIT BASED AWARDS REPORT



ABOUT

History

In order to promote outstanding graduate student work at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) announced the third annual Merit Based Awards in Spring 2022 to recognize graduate student excellence in Diversity, Mentorship, Research, Service and Outreach, and Teaching. These awards funded two (2) students in each category for a total of ten (10) awards, each in the amount of \$5,000.

Funding Sources

A total of \$61,075 from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Scholarship were allocated to fund the 2021-2022 Merit Based Awards program, of which \$50,000 was then distributed as cash awards to the ten (10) winners and the remaining was used to support Graduate Student administrative personnel and processes. This continued funding by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research and Scholarship has provided funding to 30 Graduate Students to acknowledge and honor their dedication to their service and work.

2021 - 2022 APPLICATIONS

51 *Total Applications*



22 *Peer Reviewers*



Merit Based Award

DIVERSITY

Description

The Merit Based Awards in Diversity are designed to recognize outstanding graduate student work related to diversity or diverse populations. The Graduate Student Organization defines diversity broadly to include race and ethnicity, national origin, indigenous heritage, gender, sexual orientation, age, developmental or acquired disabilities, socioeconomic status, and other human attributes with significant implications for social identity and historical experience.

5 *Applications*

Merit Based Award Recipient

DIVERSITY



Katherine Achacoso

I'd like to mahalo the Graduate Student Organization committee for awarding me a 2022 Diversity Merit Scholarship. For this year's cycle, my application focused predominantly on the community engaged ethics that underpins my activism, research, and teaching. As a queer daughter of Filipinx immigrants with ancestral ties to Surigao and Bohol, my scholarship and teaching is deeply informed by my family's anti-colonial struggles and resilience. Within my scholarship, thus, I honor the stories of where my mother comes from, in Surigao, highlighting the environmental consequences of the development of North American extractive industries within our various islands. Mapping the archipelagic movement of logics of American settler extractivism as they are imagined on Surigaonon lands, I emphasize the interlapping relationship between histories of colonization as well as the need to reimagine constellations of co-resistance. In my teaching, thus, in bringing forth the land struggles that shaped my ancestors' migration, I've also developed a series of academic and community run courses and web series (see [#HoyGetOutOftheSun / maunakeasyllabus.com](#)) educating the next-generation of Filipinx scholars on the complexity of anti-colonial struggles within the Philippines and in diaspora especially in occupied Hawai'i. In my classes, which are taught from an intersectional / Indigenous feminist analysis, I provide students the space to think relationally about how Filipinx histories relate to Indigenous histories in occupied Hawai'i and Turtle Island. In doing so, building from my commitment to settler activism, I use my classroom as a tool to raise political consciousness and to facilitate critical dialogues about our kuleana to decolonial struggles not only as settlers but as descendants of a vast genealogy resisting and surviving colonial rule. As an educator and writer, I want to encourage my students to use the classroom as a space to confront difficult realities not only to address our complicity in Indigenous dispossession and internalized anti-blackness, but also to imagine different kinds of futurities. In doing so, as my application notes, I hope to contribute to pushing conversations on diversity to imagine beyond a liberal politics of inclusion and equality and to instead dream alternative decolonial ways of relating and being.

Merit Based Award Recipient

DIVERSITY



Lauren Li‘iPi‘ilani Stevens Nāhiwa

As a Hawaiian who has been afforded the privilege of higher education, it is incumbent upon those of us who hold the tools provided to continue to chip away at the many obstacles that impede further progress no ka Lāhui Hawai‘i. It is also an avenue to work towards fulfilling our kuleana as Kānaka.

While realizing the effects of the lack of parity for ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in our various communities, for example: here at the University, in our State offices, in our Public Schools and in other sectors of the public domain, it became evident that research and work around bringing ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i to the fore in these areas were imperative in promoting a healthy society for Hawai‘i as a whole. The apparent lack of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in law and our courts is of great concern. The Hawaiian Kingdom’s first legal documents and Kumu Kānāwai were written in Hawaiian. What may not be widely known is the fact that many of our laws here in Hawai‘i are founded upon Hawaiian legal precedent and language. Promoting further progress in this area would behoove all who call Hawai‘i home. Moreover, it would inform the appropriate stewardship of our ‘Āina Aloha, ‘o Hawai‘i.

Allowing access to haumāna living in disparately impacted and predominantly Hawaiian communities to Early College opportunities at the University of Hawai‘i is a step toward equipping our keiki with the tools they need to succeed. Giving our children the opportunity to learn about their language, history and culture while still in high school offers them an avenue to consider higher education and other possibilities.

Education comes in many forms; the most important thing is how we use what we learn. E lawe i ke a‘o a mālama, a e ‘oi mau ka na‘auao!



Merit Based Award

MENTORSHIP

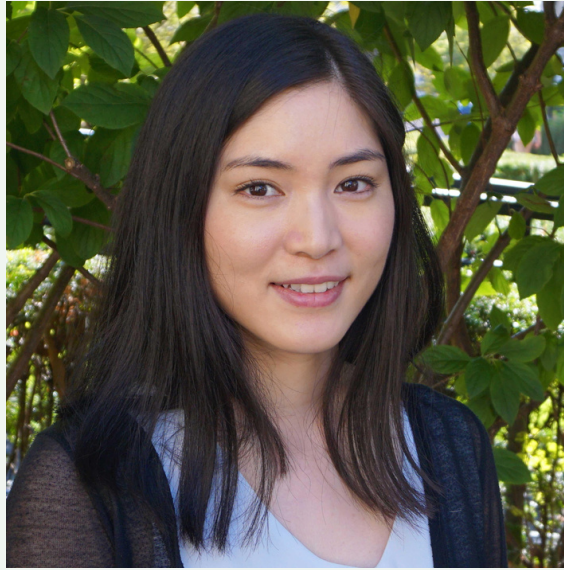
Description

The Graduate Student Organization recognizes the importance of encouraging graduate student mentorship of other students at the University of Hawai'i System in a way that fosters a positive academic climate and promotes professional development. For this award, mentorship is defined as a professional relationship where an experienced person (the mentor) assists another student (the mentee) to develop specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth. For the purposes of this award, examples of mentorship include, but are not limited to, mentoring graduate or undergraduate students at the University of Hawai'i; providing career counseling; and co-authoring or presenting research with mentees. Graduate student mentors should maintain the highest degree of professional conduct; provide constructive critique; and help to promote the intellectual growth and critical thinking of mentees. Working with mentees from underrepresented, first-generation, or marginalized groups is a priority with attention paid to developing skills and support networks for overcoming institutional barriers they may face in the field.

4 *Applications*

Merit Based Award Recipient

MENTORSHIP



Ann Choe

As part of my Graduate Assistantship, I taught four undergraduate courses in the Department of Second Language Studies (SLS) as an independent instructor. Because of this, I had a chance to meet students of all walks who wish to advance their knowledge in language learning and teaching as well as pursue a career in foreign language education. Since I have pursued a similar path, I was frequently approached by students who needed advice on their applications to SLS's MA program, language teaching certificate programs, and studying/teaching abroad programs, among other professional development opportunities. I enjoyed sharing insights with these students because they saw me not merely as an "instructor" but as an approachable mentor they could trust to help them reach their professional goals. I found it especially rewarding whenever a former student informed me that their MA or studying abroad applications had been accepted or that my guidance had helped them secure a teaching position immediately after graduation. These students worked hard and earned their success, and I feel very honored to have helped them thrive. Among the many ambitious students I have worked with, one student showed a strong interest in publishing her final project in UH's undergraduate research journal, Horizons. I was impressed by her dedication to taking the project further, and I continued to lend her support even after the course ended. A year later, I was invited to attend the Horizons virtual student panel as a "mentor." Words cannot express how happy I was to see her as one of the panelists sharing her experience with the publication process. Seeing her accomplishment is my greatest gratification. After all, a mentor's success is visible in what the students can accomplish with facilitation.

Merit Based Award Recipient

MENTORSHIP

Cody Clifton



I am a 4th year Ph.D. student in the Nutritional Sciences - Animal Science track program, conducting research at the University of Hawai'i Health and Stranding Lab to investigate the health of whales and dolphins in the Pacific.

One of the most valuable aspects of a university setting is the ability to pair passionate researchers and educators with new students that have budding interest in their fields. I have been fortunate to have been guided by many great educators in my life, individuals who have been willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them professionally. As a mentor, my constant aim is to bring that sort of passion and inclusive attitude to all interactions with my mentees. Exposure to new avenues of research in both my undergraduate and graduate education has been very beneficial in helping me to focus my personal goals, and I work to pass that benefit along to others.

I have high expectations of all the individuals that I mentor, which I believe helps them learn to think more critically about the work that they perform, ultimately leading them to success in their future aspirations.

I believe that college should be undertaken with the end goal of finding a career, and my mentoring philosophy and style reflects that. The students that I mentor come from a wide range of backgrounds and experience levels, so I work to tailor my instruction and expectations for each individual. I prioritize aiming for very specific and achievable targets that always have professional development in mind. Maintaining constant, open communication with mentees is also of critical importance, because without cumulative discussions on both successes and failures, it is difficult for students to develop their professional skillset.

I truly enjoy acting as a mentor and appreciate that it gives me the opportunity to be more deeply involved in both the university and island communities. I look forward to continuing to mentor students and community members in my time at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and beyond.



Merit Based Award

RESEARCH

Description

The Graduate Student Organization aims to support graduate students in the timely completion of their program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa by encouraging excellence in research. To support this aim, GSO Merit Based Awards in Research will be awarded to two (2) students at either Master's or Doctoral level. Successful candidates will demonstrate a history of scholarly contributions and a commitment to research.

10 *Applications*

Merit Based Award Recipient

RESEARCH

Rachel Engel



I am a 4th year PhD student in the Sociology Department studying racism, colorism, inequality, and globalization, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia.

Originally from Thailand, I first migrated to the United States at the age of 18 to pursue my undergraduate studies at UC Santa Barbara. As a first-generation undergraduate student, I never would've dreamed a graduate degree would've been in the realm of possibility. As such, when a professor approached me and suggested I apply to doctoral programs, I was in disbelief. I chose to attend UH Mānoa based on the university's specialization in the Asia-Pacific region. I received my MA in Sociology in 2021 and am currently on track to receive my PhD in 2024.

During my time at UH Mānoa, I've had the honor and privilege of working with fantastic mentors with whom I have conducted multiple studies focused on fair housing issues in the state of Hawai'i, where residents continue to navigate extreme housing precarity. The studies have examined the lived experience of public housing residents and low-income families applying for Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as Section 8), explored innovative inclusive housing projects such as self-help housing on Big Island, and more recently, supported the efforts of the Windward Eviction Prevention Program funded by the Castle Foundation. Our research team primarily employs qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, which seek to provide a comprehensive view of our respondents' lives and their housing trajectories. The research is often complemented by quantitative methods and legal research.

Our research team has produced multiple reports for local nonprofits and governmental agencies, chiefly pushing for policy recommendations which include legal housing protections for marginalized communities such as survivors of domestic violence, limited English-proficient (LEP) peoples, Native Hawaiians, immigrants, COFA nationals, transgender people, and more. Coming from a family of immigrants – Nazi Holocaust survivors and a mother from rural Thailand with limited English proficiency – my research hits close to home and remains pertinent to my immediate family. I aim to continue to produce research which sheds light on systems of inequality here in Hawai'i and globally.

Merit Based Award Recipient

RESEARCH

Christian Flores González



I would like to thank the Graduate Student Organization and its funding providers for giving financial opportunities to graduate students at different stages of their programs. I am a final year Ph.D. student at the Institute for Astronomy, and soon I will start a job as a researcher at the Institute of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

Our Sun is our closest star. Its magnetic activity is responsible for beautiful polar auroras but also life-threatening solar storms. My research aims to decipher the magnetic fields in the interior of stars, which is a crucial ingredient in the evolution of young suns and their planetary systems. Furthermore, my work provides the foundation for studying magnetic storms, which will allow us to understand and prepare for solar eruptions and their catastrophic consequences on our lives.

With over 100 stars observed, my thesis is the most extensive and detailed investigation of magnetism in young stars. This work has been possible thanks to the key technologies that UH provides. Firstly, the NASA Infrared Telescope atop Maunakea, hosting one of the few instruments in the world capable of measuring magnetism in distant stars, and secondly, the UH Mana-super computer, which is crucial to performing complex magnetic calculations. The scientific project I lead has been awarded over 500 hours of telescope time over the past five years, and from these observations, I have published five first-author papers in high-impact astronomical journals. Thanks to this award, I will be able to develop this science further and present my work at international conferences.

<https://www.facebook.com/christian.a.gonzalez.9/>

https://www.instagram.com/christianflow_r/



Merit Based Award

THE RACHEL WADE AWARD FOR SERVICE AND OUTREACH

Description

The Graduate Student Organization recognizes the importance of promoting graduate student service to the University and outreach to the community at large with the awarding of the Rachel Wade Merit Based Award for Service and Outreach. This category is broadly defined to recognize student-led projects/programs, and/or student work experience that benefits and enriches the university, local, and/or global community. Successful applicants will demonstrate a history of beneficence.

9 *Applications*

Merit Based Award Recipient

THE RACHEL WADE AWARD FOR SERVICE AND OUTREACH

Maria Costantini

I am beyond honored to receive the Rachel Ward Merit Based Award for Service and Outreach. As a PhD candidate in Zoology, it is easy to focus on the science and neglect my greater role in my community. My personal view of a successful graduate experience is not one in which I reach the end with only a list of publications and grants as proof of my success. No doubt that these aspects are tremendously important, but I very much believe that a successful graduate degree embodies service to the community.



During my Master's degree at a different university, I struggled with imposter syndrome and often didn't know where or who to go to for help with professional development. I served several years here at UH as GSO Zoology representative and graduate representative for the Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology (EECB) certificate program. In both roles, it was important for me to provide support for my peers. With EECB I organized several professional development workshops and social gatherings to build a sense of community.

Outside of the university, I have volunteered my time to encourage female empowerment. Some ways that I have done this is through work with Hawai'i Girl Scouts and coaching Girls on the Run teams. I have also worked hard to do outreach about my research and the animals I study, which are critically endangered Hawaiian birds. Native birds are important ecologically and culturally, however, nowadays most species are in such low numbers that people can live their entire lives here and never see one. Therefore, it is my responsibility to share my knowledge, especially with the next generation, to foster curiosity and love for a group that is constantly being threatened by extinctions.

Merit Based Award Recipient

THE RACHEL WADE AWARD FOR SERVICE AND OUTREACH

Chelsea Nicholas

I feel very fortunate to receive the Rachael Wade Merit-Based Award for Service and Outreach. This award aligns with my values as a biomedical graduate student, a community health messenger for underserved populations, and a human rights advocate.

My name is Chelsea Nicholas, and I was born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. I am currently an MS candidate in Tropical Medicine, Medical Microbiology, and Pharmacology under the outstanding mentorship of DrPH Angela Sy. As a multiracial woman pursuing biomedical research, I strongly believe in data empowerment and cultural humility for health equity.



As a research assistant for the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics in Underserved Populations: "Puipuia le Ola" of Hawai'i and Guam, I strive to increase the uptake of COVID-19 testing and education among Pacific Islanders by using culturally relevant strategies. I also assist as a data specialist for the Hawaii Department of Health and the NHPI COVID-19 3R Response team. My immersion into each Pacific Islander community's cultural and societal structures inspired my research to tailor health information for these marginalized populations. At Queen's Medical Center, I am investigating the comorbidities and mortality of COVID-19 patients. These findings will help answer the most common questions I receive as a community health messenger. In conjunction with these efforts, I was accepted into the NIH's Minority Health Research Training Program in Health Disparities to expand my reach in aiding health services.

I would like to publicly recognize the other UH-affiliated initiatives that embraced my heritage and academic learning. The Pasifika Empowerment and Advancement and the Office of Multicultural Student Services' Pasefika Passion Pipeline provide a safe space for Pacific Islander students to learn and exchange practical knowledge. Also, Fealofani O Samoa fosters student freedom of cultural expression on campus and in the community. Fa'afetai tele lava!



Merit Based Award

THE HANNAH LIEBREICH AWARD FOR TEACHING

Description

The Graduate Student Organization recognizes exemplary teaching within the University of Hawai'i System by graduate students, either as lecturers or teaching assistants, with the Hannah Liebreich Merit Based Award for Teaching. For this award, excellence in teaching is defined as, but not limited to, using creativity and effort to improve course content/curriculum, building rapport with students, willingness to hold special help sessions, engaging in efforts to stimulate independent thinking, and/or going beyond normal teaching responsibilities. Applicants for the Hannah Liebreich Merit Based Award in Teaching should provide clear examples of how they implemented this criteria in at least one course that they have taught within the University of Hawai'i System during their current program of study.

8 *Applications*

Merit Based Award Recipient

THE HANNAH LIEBREICH AWARD FOR TEACHING

Noreen Kohl



I am a Sociology Ph.D. Candidate and I have seven years of experience as a lecturer teaching sociology at UHM. In addition to teaching, I am a research consultant and proud parent of two young children, Pearl and Huey.

Social justice pedagogy guides my teaching. I take a critical approach and value inclusion, equity, justice, and participation in learning. My teaching centers an inclusive, engaging classroom environment and emphasizes intellectual empathy. I enjoy creating opportunities for academic enrichment by involving students in advocacy work, hands-on research, and collaborative partnerships.

One of my core teaching objectives is to improve critical thinking about the institutional and structural root of social issues that are often individualized by dominant discourses. In my courses, I encourage students to shift from individualistic explanations towards more nuanced, critical analysis of social problems and power relations. Another teaching goal is to meet students “where they are” in terms of knowledge about course material.

I am interested in breaking down barriers inherent in the academic hierarchy to support historically excluded groups, including women and BIPOC students pursuing higher education. In my role as instructor, I connect undergraduates with resources for professional development whenever possible. To expand opportunities for learning outside the classroom, I encourage undergraduate involvement in campus events such public talks and local conferences.

As a student myself, I am fortunate to learn from exceptional professors, including my chair, as well as fellow graduate students who are teachers, who embody excellence in teaching. Every class, I learn from my students and I am inspired by the knowledge and perspective they bring to discussion. I am honored to accept this award with gratitude for the model teachers in my life and especially for the excellent students I am privileged to teach at UHM.

Merit Based Award Recipient

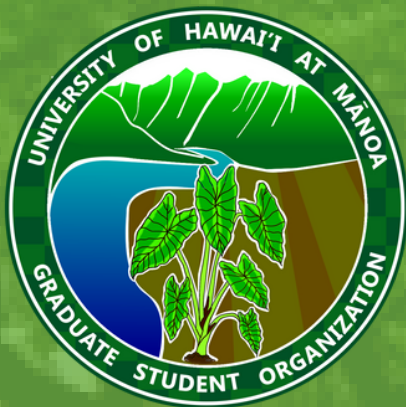
THE HANNAH LIEBREICH AWARD FOR TEACHING



Hoa Le

Hoa Le is a Ph.D. candidate in the Second Language Studies Department in the College of Arts, Languages, and Letters. During the past two years she has taught undergraduate classes in the Vietnamese language program where she developed new, innovative syllabi and course material that served the diverse and real-world needs of her students. She believes education, and language teaching in particular, should aim to contribute to modern society, which is rooted in rounded, open, and well-developed educational concepts. Importantly, it should place the learners at the center of education, educating the whole person, and promote mutual aid and cooperation in the classroom. She advocates for a class where the learners are given the “learning by doing” opportunities whenever possible to “do” real-world tasks that help them learn the language implicitly. In Spring 2021, she connected several advanced heritage language students with a community project where the students provided language assistance to elder Vietnamese immigrants at Covid-19 vaccination sites. Such projects helped her students find the joy and satisfaction of learning and maintaining their heritage language, while putting what they learned into authentic practice. When teaching online, Hoa put extra effort to take advantage of technology making her lessons interactive and engaging. Her students have expressed that they enjoyed and were delighted learning this tonal language and connecting to its culture.

Being recognized by the Hannah Liebreich Merit Based Award for Teaching award is a reward for Hoa’s constant effort in innovative teaching, and the heart and soul that she put in every lesson. She is humbled and appreciative for this recognition and dedicates it to her wonderful students.



Merit Based Awards Program
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UHM Graduate Student Organization

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