

A Report on Community Colleges and Science and Civic Engagement in Asia: A Yearlong and Continuing Journey

Robert W. Franco

University of Hawai'i

Throughout 2013 I had the opportunity to travel to East and South Asia, to explore connections between the work of community colleges and civically engaged science. What follows is a general summary of what was learned through a combination of ethnographic observation and ongoing scholarly engagement with Sias University in China, the Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Program (APHERP) at the East-West Center in Hawai'i, and the University of Mumbai in India. The report will conclude by suggesting how these international interactions relate to a new Teagle Foundation-funded project at Kapi'olani Community College and the Community College National Center for Community Engagement (CCNCCE).

International Water Conference at Sias University, Henan Province, China

Sias University is the first solely American-owned university in Central China, affiliated with both Zhengzhou University and Fort Hays State University, Kansas. It is located in Henan Province, which was the center of a rising Chinese

civilization nearly 5,000 years ago. Today, more than 100 million people live in Henan, which is two-thirds the size of Arizona. Although the Yellow River does not flow through Henan Province as it once did, the river skirts the boundaries of the Sias campus.

Dr. Paul Elsner, who for 22 years served as Chancellor of the 10-campus Maricopa Community College System, invited me to make a presentation at the Sias University International Water Conference, May 22–25, 2013. Dr. Elsner knew that Kapi'olani Community College (KCC) and the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM) had developed and sustained a strong service learning and civic engagement program called *Malama i na Ahupua'a* (to care for the ahupua'a), which engages students and faculty in restoring ancient Hawaiian watersheds throughout the island of O'ahu.

He knew about "Kapi'olani Sustainability and Service Learning" (KSSL, our new name), through our two-decades-long partnership with the CCNCCE, an organization that he founded and strongly supported as Chancellor. Dr. Elsner is currently on the Board of Sias University and saw striking

similarities between water problems in Arizona and central China.

However, Dr. Elsner did not know of my earlier anthropological work in this field and its relevance to the conference topic. In 1995 I published a report for the UHM Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) entitled, "Water: Its Meaning and Management in Pre-contact Hawaii." This paper was developed in professional collaboration with Dr. Marion Kelly, who was an advocate for Native Hawaiian people and history and founded the UHM Ethnic Studies Department. Both the report and the collaboration coincided with the development of the Malama i na Ahupua'a program.

The WRCC report was set against the controversial theory linking irrigation with "oriental despotism" that Karl A. Wittfogel presented in *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (1957). Wittfogel analyzed the role of irrigation works, the bureaucratic structures needed to maintain them, and the impact that these had on society, coining the term "hydraulic empire." This theory has led many Western archaeologists to focus on early forms of irrigation and water management.

During the late prehistoric period in ancient Hawaii, irrigation and other water management practices supported the sociopolitical evolution of a proto-state. The report used archaeological data as a point of departure to analyze the meaning and management of water in this period. An analysis of Hawaiian chants, legends, and proverbs was woven into the archaeological data in an attempt to better understand the meaning of water to the indigenous people of the Hawaiian Islands.¹ The report concluded that intra-island (windward-leeward) and inter-island (geological-hydrological) variation produced important localized meanings of water, and that these meanings changed over time, largely in relation to population growth, production, intensification, and increasing sociopolitical complexity. My own research in this area provided a useful context for my participation in the international discussions that took place during my visits.

The Sias International Water Conference brought together international and Chinese scholars. Prominent international researchers included Dr. Jonathon Overpeck, who served as a coordinating lead author for the Nobel Prize-winning UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment (2007); Dr. Sharon Megdal, Director of

the University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center; and Dr. Brian Fagan, with whom I studied archaeology at UC Santa Barbara in the early 1970s, and who is the celebrated author of *The Attacking Ocean* (2013), and other major world archaeology publications. Chinese researchers included: Dr. Zuo Qiting, Professor, College of Water Conservancy and Environmental Engineering, Zhengzhou University, and Director of the Water Science Research Center; Dr. Zhang Qiang, Deputy Director of Department of Water Resources and Environment, Sun Yat-Sen University; and Yao Tandong: Glaciologist at China's Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research.

China is one of the most water-rich countries in the world, but water resources are unevenly distributed and overwhelmingly concentrated in the south and far west on the Tibetan Plain, which also serves as a major water source for India. Water scarcity has always been a problem for Northern China and has been increasingly so as a result of rapid economic development. Major water engineering projects have been completed, and more are underway, to move water from the south to the north, with significant implications for Tibet-India-China relations. Major conference topics included severe water scarcity in Northern China, water quality and severe pollution in both Northern and Southern China, rural and urban challenges, and the likely deleterious future impacts of climate change, mega-droughts, and sea level.

The conference also served as a showcase for Sias University's innovative approaches to teaching and learning about water issues in China, such as a mesmerizing theatrical representation of water history in China, and their World Academy for the Future of Women (WAFW), which requires service projects as part of membership activities. Hundreds of students have gone through the Academy and created both short- and long-term projects of great value and impact. According to Dr. Linda Jacobsen, former Provost at Sias:

Some young women shared that they applied to study at Sias *because* of the exciting service projects the WAFW members were sharing at home on semester breaks. Projects include the installation of drinking water filtration systems, environmentally safe agricultural practices, communal water area clean-ups, and eliminating violence against women. Over the years, these projects, which started locally in the university community, have expanded to regions within China where the members live.

¹ I used similar data in deriving pre-contact Samoan perceptions of the meaning of "work" in my dissertation in 1985.

(Linda Jacobsen, Provost, Paper for 2014 Continuums of Service Conference, Honolulu)

My own presentation at the Water Conference was titled, “Service-Learning: Social Responsibility and Caring for Our Water Resources.” The talk sidestepped the concept of “civic responsibility,” partly because it was implied by the name of the host institution, the incipient “Institute for Social and Environmental Responsibility,” but also because I was not sure whether the discourse on the “civic” was widely understood, or even acceptable in China. My presentation was the only one addressing sea-level rise and coastal water issues and it offered the GLISTEN project (Great Lakes Innovative Stewardship through Education Network) as a model for tackling major water issues in China. The paper was very well received (I’m sure the beautiful photos of Hawaiian ecosystems helped), and Dr. Jacobsen and I continue to dialog about future directions and partnerships.

East-West Center: Asia Pacific Higher Education Research Program (APHERP), Senior Seminar, at Hong Kong Institute for Education

In July 2013, I was invited to participate in a Senior Seminar entitled, “Research, Development and Innovation in Asian Pacific Higher Education,” September 26–28, 2013. The seminar was led by APHERP Co-Directors, Drs. Deane Neubauer (UH Emeritus) and Dr. John Hawkins (UCLA), and brought together 14 higher education researchers, administrators, and faculty from China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Australia, Chile, and the United States. My participation constituted a follow-up to East West Center-sponsored seminars in Honolulu and Indonesia that focused on developments in Asian-Pacific Education with a view toward 2020.

Dr. Neubauer’s concept paper provided a focus for the seminar:

Research and development (R&D) have long been a key component of what has generally been called “research universities.” There is also recognition that in order to stay on the cutting edge of R&D, higher education institutions (HEIs) must increasingly strive for innovative R&D, and this has important implications for the structure and governance of higher education as well as numerous other factors of HE

change and transformation. Furthermore, in a manner that may be unprecedented in the period of the so-called modern university, innovation, as almost a form of social responsibility, has been thrust upon the university. Interestingly and overwhelmingly, due to the role that the university is performing within the emergent knowledge society, innovation in the “knowledge transfer” functions of the university—the teaching role foremost among them—has become of increasingly greater importance.

I was invited to present a paper titled, “The University-Community Compact: Innovation in Community Engagement,” which focused on the evolution of the American community college and its essential functions: university transfer, workforce development, and educating for engaged citizenship. The paper discussed the central differences among three related concepts:

- Civic engagement as the “participation of private actors in the public sphere, conducted through direct and indirect interactions of civil society organizations and citizens-at-large with government, multilateral institutions, and business establishments to influence decision making or pursue common goals” (World Bank).
- Civic responsibility as “the active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good” (Robinson and Gottlieb, American Association of Community Colleges).
- Community engagement as “the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Carnegie Foundation Community Engagement website).

Significantly, all three definitions skirt the discourse on democracy, which was advantageous in this context as I was uncertain about the advisability of discussing democracy in contemporary China. The presentation also used the GLISTEN initiative as a model and explored strategies for taking civic action on major water issues in East and Southeast Asia.

Community colleges are emergent in East, Southeast, and South Asia. However, five core features of American

community colleges are underdeveloped. American community colleges are

1. Rooted in local communities, preparing local students for successful economic, social, and civic engagement in their regions;
2. “Open door” institutions, with less rigorous entry requirements;
3. Subsidized by states, with lower tuition rates;
4. Focused on rigorous workforce and career development through one-year certificates, two-year degrees, and life-long learning;
5. Organized to prepare students to meet the requirements of rigorous baccalaureate programs.

In-depth interactions with the 14 seminar participants enabled deep and sustained discussions on these and other topics related to innovation in Asian-Pacific-American higher education. Most of the innovations discussed were not focused on the role of higher education in fostering civic engagement. They were instead focused on innovations in technology and on research and development as drivers of economic and workforce development. This was seen as higher education’s larger social responsibility.

The seminar papers are currently being considered for publication by Palgrave-Macmillan, which will be publishing a new volume on *Service Learning in America’s Community Colleges* later this year. Kapi’olani’s contribution to that volume is entitled, “Service Learning’s Role in Achieving Institutional Outcomes” (Yao Hill, Bob Franco, Tanya Renner, Krista Hiser, and Francisco Acoba).

Developing Community Colleges with the University of Mumbai

After the Hong Kong seminar, I traveled to the University of Mumbai for the fourth stage in discussions about establishing the University of Mumbai (UM) community colleges. These discussions have largely taken place at the level of senior leadership at KCC, UH, and UM, and had contributed to a grant proposal submitted to the Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative, advocating the building of higher-education bridges between India and the United States, the world’s two largest democracies.

For three days in October, I participated in very full days of meetings. Major progress was made on the grant proposal, which focuses on the development of UM community colleges offering general education and training in Hospitality Management, Health Services, and Business.

India is determined to transform its future economic growth through higher education reform, seeking to expand access to quality workforce development programs as well as to improve employment prospects for India’s burgeoning youth population of 700 million. The U.S. community college model is increasingly seen as one of the key vehicles driving this reform across India, bringing a formal two-year associate degree, job-focused certifications and industry linkages, and broader community and societal impacts, particularly in spurring income growth for diverse communities and populations.

On the evening of October 2, the UM leadership graciously escorted me to the University’s glorious celebration of the birthday of Mohandas Gandhi. Earlier we had talked about Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and their roles in inspiring civil and civic action. We also discussed Martin Luther King’s role in the American civil rights movement, and the concurrent development of America’s community colleges throughout the 1960s. During the intensive three days we even developed a course outline focusing on the lives of these two men and Nelson Mandela, which would be used as part of the new general education curriculum to be implemented at the UM Community College at Ratnagiri.

Mumbai, with a population of 13 million, and Ratnagiri, with a population of 1.7 million, are located on India’s long western coast on the Arabian Sea in Maharashtra State. This coastal ecosystem supports millions of residents and attracts millions of domestic and international visitors annually. We had in-depth discussions on how to promote sustainable tourism in Maharashtra State, particularly in the context of sea-level rise, and water challenges throughout India. Again, the SENCER GLISTEN model provided a pattern for collaborative and civic action.

Throughout the rest of October I developed the partnership proposal, which has four objectives:

- Develop a best practice University of Mumbai Community College at Ratnagiri (UMCCR) with an initial degree program in Hospitality Studies, followed by Health Studies and Business and Financial Services Programs.

- Develop at the University of Mumbai, Kalina Campus, The Center for Excellence in Community College Leadership, Teaching, Research, and Development (COE).
- Develop articulated degree pathways linking UMCCR, UM, and KCC and UH, initially in Hospitality Studies, and then in Health Studies and Business and Financial Services.
- Develop university-private-civil sector partnership agreements to support the UM-KCC-UH collaboration now and into the future.

Conclusion

Fresh water-saltwater convergences, and water availability and quality, are major global issues that affect the United States and East, Southeast, and South Asia. Higher education systems in all these areas are conducting research that informs public policy development. Meanwhile these problems are intensifying at an exponential pace. Our colleges and universities need to research, educate, and partner with non-profit organizations, and with local, state, and federal agencies to reduce the severity of the impact of water issues. The community colleges are well situated to do this work in close collaboration and authentic partnership with transfer universities that share the same ecosystems.

In January, 2014, KCC and CCNCCE received a three-year \$270,000 grant from the Teagle Foundation titled “Student Learning for Civic Capacity: Stimulating Moral, Ethical, and Civic Engagement for Learning That Lasts.” In this project seven community colleges in six states, New York (2), New Jersey, Louisiana, Arizona, California, and Hawai’i, are integrating the following “Big Question” into first- and second-year courses: “How do we build OUR commitment to civic and moral responsibility for diverse, equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities?”

This question is the kind of capacious, contested, and civic issue that SENCER continues to emphasize in its work on the STEM curriculum. I hope to present some answers to this question, from a community college perspective, at SSI 2015. Meanwhile, I welcome discussions on this question with university colleagues through the SENCER network as it expands to include countries around the globe.

About the Author



An ecological anthropologist, *Dr. Robert Franco* has published scholarly and policy research on the changing meaning of work, service, schooling, housing, and leadership for Samoans at home and abroad; health

disparities confronting Samoan, Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations in the United States; the meaning and management of water in ancient Hawai’i; and sociocultural factors affecting fisheries in Samoa and the Northern Marianas. In 2009, he was lead editor in the publication of American Samoa’s first written history.

At Kapi’olani Community College, University of Hawai’i, he has chaired the Faculty Senate and the Social Science Department, and led planning, grants, and accreditation efforts. As Director of Institutional Effectiveness, he bridges the cultures of faculty, staff, students, administration, and community partners to shape an innovative ecology of learning. With institutional commitment and support from federal and foundation sources, the college has emerged as a leader in service-learning for improved student engagement, learning and achievement. He has authored successful National Science Foundation (NSF) grants totaling more than \$13 million since 2008. He is a Faculty Leadership Fellow for NSF’s Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER) initiative, NSF’s leading undergraduate science education reform program.

He is a senior consultant and trainer for national Campus Compact. He assisted in the development of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, and was named one of 20 national “Beacons of Vision, Hope, and Action” by the Community College National Center for Community Engagement.

He is newly the national program lead for the 3-year Teagle Foundation grant to develop OUR commitment to civic and moral responsibility for diverse, equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities.

Citations

Robinson, Gail and Gottlieb, Karla, *A Practical Guide for Integrating Civic Responsibility Into the Curriculum*, 2002:16, AACC Press, Washington, D.C.