TO: Erika Lacro, Vice President for the University of Hawai‘i Community Colleges

FROM: Bert Shimabukuro and Fumi Takasugi

DATE: November 8, 2020

SUBJECT: Occupational and Environmental Safety Management (OESM) Program Honolulu CC Response

Description of program response process

In response to the BoR and UHCC VP Erika Lacro memo of October 12, 2020, HonCC’s OESM program reached out to industry to discuss a response to the memo. Numerous responses to a survey regarding the program and many letters materialized as a result, strongly advocating to keep the OESM program at HonCC. This memo is based on this feedback as well as the current situation of the program to serve as a preliminary response to the UHCC VP and the BoR.

Key data indicators and trends that emerged from discussion as significant and reason for significance

1. Overview

This program has a long history with the safety community in Hawaii, having been developed in response to the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1972. Our long-time faculty member, Chulee Grove, retired in December 2019. Part of Chulee’s job duties included Health & Safety Coordinator for the campus. As a result of her retirement, the campus has not had a full-time faculty member for the OESM program, and is also short a Health & Safety Coordinator. Currently, a handful of lecturers teach the required classes as well as a selection of program elective courses. Low fill-rates due to an unusual structure of course offerings and a need for more field experience for students with degrees specifically focused on safety became apparent as necessary areas for improvement and as areas in which a more streamlined program may be possible.

2. Discussion

a. Low fill rates explained

Students in the program currently have a choice of courses to take, based on the kind of safety professional they seek to become. As a result, numerous lecturers with specializations have been teaching few course a semester, with one or two lecturers teaching the requisite introductory courses. Due to the numerous choices, given the small intake per year, class fill rates are low past the first year.

b. Change in curriculum structure instead of non-credit route


Due to a very specific structure of the curriculum that has been dependent on the specializations of the lecturer staff, over time numerous courses have been offered as electives, a number of which students must take in order to graduate. Classes are also offered largely in the evening when both working students and lecturers are able to meet. A restructuring and streamline of this set-up is under consideration in coordination with academic counseling. Industry makes it clear that the OESM degree from HonCC is valuable. Industry is not in favor of moving the program into non-credit offerings due to the value of a degree from an accredited institution, from which many graduates hold positions of leadership in the industry today.

c. Work more closely with industry for internships and field experience
Numerous industry voices are suggesting working more closely with students through internships and other ways of students gaining field experience and industry partners meeting potential employees.

3. Agreement on more cooperative efforts between program and industry

The swiftness and pertinence of feedback from industry suggests a tight connection between the HonCC OESM program and the safety industry. Program graduates flourish in the field. The industry in Hawaii as well as on the mainland US have many graduates from the program in prominent leadership positions.

Recommendations

1. The program has begun to consider streamlining course offerings and restructuring the curriculum to create a daytime program, more in line with other programs at the college. Hiring to restore a full-time faculty member for the program will expedite this process and nullify the need for numerous classes with low fill rates.

2. Incorporating suggestions from industry, the program will work more closely with industry partners to give students more internships and field experience opportunities. This would also bring the curriculum up-to-date, as suggested by industry.

3. While the safety industry voices call for 4-year degrees, there is no Occupational Safety degree. Thus, currently, the 2-year AS degree at HonCC in combination with 2 more years in Business or other area of concentration does not adequately fulfill the needs of the industry. Possibilities for a 2+2 with another UH campus would help to fulfill the industry preference for the creation of a 4-year Occupational Safety degree.