Kapi`olani Community College (Kapi`olani CC) is one of seven community colleges that, with an Employment Training Center, make up the University of Hawai`i Community Colleges (UHCC). Unlike many community colleges which have much local or district control, the UHCC are part of the statewide University of Hawai`i (UH) System. Governance of the community colleges is centralized under the Chancellor of Community Colleges, who is also Senior Vice President of the University. Each community college has its own Provost. Ultimate governance of the University system rests with a Board of Regents. Hawai`i’s governor appoints the Regents.

The UHCC are "open door" institutions and impose few restrictions on admission. In fact, admission is open to any graduate of a U.S. high school or anybody else who is 18 years old or older.\(^1\) With such a broad admissions policy, the community colleges attract a large diversity of students with a wide range in ages, academic preparation, ethnic groupings, and educational goals. Demographic tables for Kapi`olani Community College (the newest of the state community colleges and the focus of this article) show that its nearly 7,000 students belong to at least 15 ethnic groups. In addition, about 300 international students at this college come from more than 30 countries.\(^2\)
The strategic plans and mission statements of the individual community colleges and the Chancellor's office emphasize "diversity." For example, in its current strategic plan, Kapiʻolani CC stated as one of its four goals was to "champion diversity." The same word appears in the school's academic development plan. A similar note sounds in the Chancellor's strategic plan for the UHCC system. That plan speaks of “championing diversity and respect for differences” and providing “universal access.” The plan also states that one of the missions of the UHCC is to “broaden access to higher education in Hawai`i.”

While goals in mission statements and strategic plans are necessarily general, it may be pointed out that in none of the documents mentioned above does the word "disability" appear. Indeed, the diversity to be “championed” at Kapiʻolani CC, according to its strategic plan and academic development plan, is a focus on Hawaiian, Pacific Island and Asian programs. The “broadened access to higher education” mentioned in the UHCC strategic plan is specifically to enable "traditionally disadvantaged adults" and "any high school graduate or adult aged 18 or older" to enter quality educational programs within his or her community.

While such general statements about emphasizing cultural diversity do not necessarily signal a lack of attention to persons with disabilities, the lack of such references indicates that improving service to persons with disabilities was not thought to be a strategic goal significant enough to mention when these plans were developed. Furthermore, the emphasis on cultural diversity in these documents raises questions about just where, in the scheme of “diversity thinking,” students with disabilities would be located. Suppose a native Hawaiian student has a profound hearing loss. The student could be classified as a Deaf Hawaiian student or a Hawaiian Deaf student? In which
category would this student be most likely to receive the most services in an institution that "champions [cultural] diversity" and aims to provide "universal access"?

Such questions notwithstanding, the UHCC and the University of Hawai`i do broadcast a clear policy of nondiscrimination for persons with disabilities. For example, inside the front cover of Kapi`olani CC's 2000-2001 catalog is the following statement: "It is the policy of the University of Hawai`i to comply with Federal and State laws which prohibit discrimination in University programs and activities, including but not necessarily limited to the following laws ~ which cover students and applicants for admission to the University." The laws cited include Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The statement also cites laws that prohibit discrimination in employment.

Near the end of the statement are these words about the community colleges: "The UH Community Colleges strive to promote full realization of equal opportunity through a positive, continuing program including Titles I-IV of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) P.L. 101- 336. Accordingly, vocational education opportunities will be offered without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, or disability." The word "vocational" in this policy is required to show that the colleges comply with requirements for receiving vocational funds. Presumably, the community colleges apply the same nondiscriminatory policies in their non-vocational educational opportunities such as in liberal arts.

The catalog also contains a section specifically entitled "Notice to Students with Disabilities." The notice, which describes the availability of services for students with disabilities, begins with these words: "In compliance with requirements relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of a disability (Second 504, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, rules effective June 3, 1977, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990) Kapi`olani
Community College prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability and assures qualified students with disabilities access to all programs of the College.  

Prefacing a list of services to students with disabilities is this statement: "In accordance with Section 88.4 of the federal rules and regulations governing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, no qualified individuals with a disability shall, on the basis of their disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives or benefits from federal financial assistance (emphasis added)."

The notice repeats the university policy on nondiscrimination and affirmative action (described above), along with a list of persons designated to coordinate the UH community college's nondiscrimination and affirmative action programs. Also described are procedures for filing complaints. The description of the complaint procedure begins with these words: "Students, employees, or applicants for admission or employment who believe that they have been discriminated against on the basis of race, sex, age, religion, color, sexual orientation, national origin, mental handicap, physical handicap, disability, marital status, veteran's status, or arrest and court record may file a complaint with [name of official]" (emphasis added).

Thus, the nondiscrimination policies of the UHCC stated emphatically that discrimination cannot be applied to "qualified individuals with a disability." Moreover, having a "mental handicap," a "physical handicap," or a "disability" does not appear to exclude anybody from the population of qualified individuals. Thus, the "open door" seems to be open to EVERYBODY.

Special Student Services at Kapi`olani Community College
Kapi`olani CC devotes extensive resources to serving students with disabilities. The school's Special Student Services Office (SSSO) coordinates services for 150-200 students with disabilities each semester. The college went through an accreditation review in 2000, and its accreditation report described its many services for students with disabilities, including the roll of the Special Student Services Office. According to the report, "The Special Student Services Office (SSSO) provides a range of services for students with special needs to achieve equal access to instruction and other campus activities. These services include readers, note-takers, scribes, sign language interpreters, and other instructional and classroom accommodations as appropriate."

The SSSO also provides orientation sessions for new faculty to help them become aware of its services. The SSSO encourages faculty to include in their syllabi a statement similar to the following: "Note-takers, readers, and books on tape can be provided for students who require such assistance. In addition, extended time on exams, in a distraction-free environment, can be provided for students who require it. If you have a disability and have not already spoken with counselors in the Special Student Services Office, you are invited to contact them at [telephone] or in [room]."

When students identify themselves to the SSSO as having a disability, the office sends a confidential notice to faculty in whose classes the students are enrolled. The notice states that the student has a disability and has been encouraged to speak to the teacher. Also indicated are classroom accommodations that the student might require. The accommodations that individual students might require include the following: an in-class note-taker; a scribe for testing and in-class assignments; a reader; a sign language interpreter; extended time for testing; testing in a minimal distraction area; enlarged print materials; taped text and handouts; special auxiliary aids (tape recorder, laptop computer, amplification devices, CCTV, magnification devices, spell checker, calculator); mobility
assistance (e.g., access to elevators); accessible table and/or chair (for students who use a wheelchair); and assistance if evacuating the room or building is necessary.

At mid-semester, the SSSO sends faculty a follow up form that asks faculty to report to the SSSO how well the student is doing in the class. The form asks about the student's attendance and performance on assignments and exams. The form also asks the teacher's opinion about whether the student should withdraw from the class.

Housed in the SSSO is the TRIO program, under the federal Trio Project, which is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. This program also provides services to eligible students who may have disabilities and supports educational endeavors of low income and first-generation college students.

Also housed in the SSSO is Project Pili Aloha, which supports students who have psychiatric disabilities and provides the faculty with information on psychiatric disabilities. The college works to meet these needs through a cooperative effort among Hawaii’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the nearby Diamond Head Mental Health Center.12

Gallaudet University Regional Center

Kapi`olani Community College is the site of a Gallaudet University Regional Center. A counselor who is fluent in American Sign Language administers the school's Program for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students. This program's support-services include providing hard-of-hearing students with note-takers, sign-language interpreters, and tutors fluent in American Sign Language. The program also provides technological assistance and academic, career, and personal counseling.13

The Gallaudet Center Program handles 20 to 30 students each semester with the assistance of tutors and sign-language interpreters. The program has nine interpreters
working on campus each semester. They are freelance interpreters and work on a part-time basis. According to the accreditation report, enrollment of deaf and hard-of-hearing students is increasing, partly as a result of the support-services in this area.\textsuperscript{14}

**Actions to Improve Access**

As the newest UHCC campus (constructed over the period 1983 to 1994), Kapi`olani CC's buildings constructed during the latter part of this period were designed to be barrier-free to persons with disabilities. Restrooms in each of these newer buildings are wheelchair accessible. A wheelchair emblem signifies the restrooms that are accessible. Parking stalls for persons with disabilities are designated in each parking lot. Braille signs are present in all elevators and in some other areas on campus. Access to instruction and services are assured for individuals with disabilities, although some problems exist with curbs, ramps, and steep slopes. Construction to correct some of those problems started in 2000.\textsuperscript{15} The accreditation report stated that the college is committed to removing all barriers to access.

In addition to improving physical features, the college has begun making its WebPages accessible to persons with disabilities. Because of the large number of web pages (the college home page, the library page, departmental pages, administrative offices pages, faculty WebPages, and pages for the many online courses developed over the past decade), making all websites accessible will require enormous time and energy. The college is likewise committed to providing access to computer work stations and, with appropriate software programs, making website information accessible to students who are blind, have low vision, or have learning disabilities.
When the Reach Sometimes Exceeds the Grasp

Kapi’olani CC sits on a hill near the slopes of Diamond Head. Although the location provides a gorgeous vista of the ocean and nearby Waikiki, the sloping campus is an obstacle for students and faculty who use wheelchairs or have other restrictions on mobility. Construction during 2000-2001 reduced the degree of slope on several sidewalks to enable easier movement about the campus. Even so, using a wheelchair to move from the lower part of the campus to the top takes time and gumption. Other weaknesses exist also— one of which is the small number of automatic doors at entrances to buildings. The college has 17 buildings that contain offices, classrooms, or support services, but only ten doors make accessibility easier for persons in wheelchairs. Currently, only the cafeteria and the library have automatic sliding doors. The bookstore has a swinging door that can be activated by a button—the SSSO has two of these doors. Another building has two of these swinging doors at opposite ends of hallway leading to three classrooms (the three classrooms themselves do not have these doors). Three women's restrooms have outside doors that can be activated by a button. No men's restroom is similarly equipped. Other than these doors, a person in a wheelchair who wants to enter a building, restroom, office, or classroom must wrestle open a heavy door or wait for somebody to help.

Maintenance of the doors is also a concern. When this article was written, the opening device for the door to the bookstore was broken. And one of the doors to the hallway mentioned above would not open when I pressed the button. On a less physical dimension, the school has had difficulty providing services to students who have learning disabilities (LD). Students tested and identified as having learning disabilities may receive special support under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. According to the college accreditation report, the college has about 60 students who have been
identified as having learning disabilities. However, the college has no licensed
diagnostician of learning disabilities. Therefore, students are referred to other institutions
for testing: “In 1997-1999, through successful liaison work by the Counselor for Students
with Disabilities, 10 to 15 students were tested by the Neuro-I Psychological Services
Department at Hawai‘i’s State Hospital. However, due to fiscal problems I in the state,
this service could not be continued. Therefore, students are again being referred to other
agencies for testing and documentation of learning disabilities.”

Availability of LD testing at other UH Community Colleges is also inadequate. In
October 2000, and again in February 2001, the UHCC advertised a position for a
"Learning Disabilities Specialist/Coordinator" to be located at Leeward Community
College but (as of March 2001) had not found the right person for the position.
Kapi‘olani CC has a position designated for a LD specialist; the position was scheduled

Three Students in my Classes

During my ten years on the faculty of Kapi‘olani CC, my classes have included
many students with disabilities. The SSSO notified me about students who had
disabilities such as attention deficit disorder, epilepsy, and narcolepsy. One student was
blind. I have learned that aside from all the polices and declarations of nondiscrimination,
where the rubber meets the road, as they say, is when teachers actually work with
students with disabilities and help them in their quest for academic success. And,
fortunately or unfortunately as the case may be, sometimes the outcome can be
determined not only by what a teacher or the school perceives as the student’s needs but
by a student's determination to seek and use the help available. To illustrate this
phenomenon, I will report my experiences with three of my former students who had disabilities, some of which were obvious, some of which were not.

The first student is a young woman in her mid-20s. I will call her Loral. Prior to Loral's entry into our community college, she had received her education in public schools under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) with an Individual Education Plan. Her mind is quick, and she has a witty sense of humor. She often speaks slowly and has difficulty reading and writing. She does not use a wheelchair and has participated in Special Olympics races. Although she lives with her parents, she holds a part-time job and has her own bank account and credit card. In art classes on the campus, she has produced some beautiful work, some of which she has sold.

With my permission, the SSSO allowed Loral to enroll in a section of my first-year speech course called “Personal and Public Speech.” This basic course covers informal person-to-person speaking, speaking in small groups, and public speaking. For their graded applications of these three kinds of speaking, students do three activities: 1) perform an out-of-class informational interview of an expert of their choice and write an analysis of their communication skills in the interview; 2) work with four or five other students to prepare and deliver an in-class group presentation and write an analysis of the group's interaction; and 3) present two individual speeches (an informative speech and a persuasive speech) and write an outline for each speech. Students also complete two exams covering course content.

Loral registered in my course on the credit/no credit option. To earn credit she had to perform her class work at a level that would otherwise earn a "C" grade. The SSSO did not provide Loral a reader or a note taker for this class. She was also not provided scribe to help her record her thoughts for written her assignments, which her father typed for her.
Loral was a serious and dedicated student. Her attendance record was perfect, and she sat in the front row of the class. She participated in class discussions and in all formal and informal class activities; she also completed all graded assignments. She gave no quarter to other members of the class and asked for nothing special from them in return.

Also impressive was the way the class accepted her. They laughed at her wit and applauded her speeches.

As an indication of their support for her, a member of her group spent one Sunday afternoon with Loral helping her develop her part of the group's oral presentation.

Her success in the course also required an extra amount of time from me. For example, since she could not write an exam, I prepared oral exams for her. As I do with all students, I gave her a study sheet to prepare for each exam. Loral's study sheet focused on the topics that I considered absolutely essential to passing the course. I was glad to find that her oral answers showed a satisfactory knowledge of those topics.

This class was Loral's first truly academic class at the college level. In a subsequent semester, she took a first-year class in "Interpersonal Communication." Loral passed that class and demonstrated thereby that a person who has her disabilities can handle academic coursework.17

Now I turn to two other students who enrolled in one of my classes one year after Loral completed "Personal and Public Speech." I'll name them Barbara and Leonard. Both students used wheelchairs; Barbara's was electric, Leonard's was not. Leonard was smaller in stature than Barbara and seemed to have less physical strength.

Both enrolled in my second-year speech class called "Argumentation and Debate." This class requires students to participate in several informal debates and three formal (graded) debates. They must also write an essay analyzing argumentation in a public controversy. For their formal debates, students research the debate topics and
prepare an outline, for me to follow during the debate. Barbara and Leonard both enrolled for the grade option (A, B, C, D, F). I do not recall receiving any notification from the SSSO that these two students needed special accommodations, and I do not have any such notification in my class folder for that class. Moreover, when I saw them in class the first day, I did not anticipate that either student needed anything special from me in the class. In the class introductions, Barbara said she held a full-time professional job.

As for Leonard, I had noticed him in another speech class taught by one of my colleagues. I occasionally saw Leonard and my colleague conversing at the end of class or in the hallway and, as far as I could tell, Leonard's disability required only that he use a wheelchair. Thus, based on information I acquired before and during the first class session, my perception was that any disability these two students had was purely physical, not mental. As far as I could tell, the only accommodations they would need in class were a table (supplied by the SSSO) to roll their chairs up to and help in opening the door.

My perception of Barbara was accurate. When her turn came to debate, she rolled her chair to the rear of the lectern and stood to present her debate speeches. Her speeches were well prepared and based on satisfactory research. She completed exams in the same time-period as the rest of the class and passed the course with a high grade. But my perception of Leonard was faulty. Leonard's physical disability was more extensive than Barbara's was. He presented in his debate speeches while sitting in his chair—not that sitting was less acceptable than standing; I just report this as an observation. And although Leonard seemed to handle his part of the first formal debate adequately and received a passing score, his debate partner told me later that Leonard had just borrowed his partner's debate outline and spoke from it instead of having an outline of his own.
Now you must understand that Leonard was not the only student of mine who had come to a debate unprepared, and I did not take his using his partner's outline as a sign he could not handle the class on his own. However, although he continued to come to class, he completed only one other formal debate, with a less satisfactory score. He did not complete the assigned paper or either of two exams. As a result, Leonard failed the class.

Or, as I thought later, maybe the class failed Leonard. I remember a remark he made to me when I discussed his course performance with him: "You need to make allowances." It was more a plea than a complaint. I wondered if I had misperceived the degree of his abilities and disabilities. His disabilities may have been only physical, as I had assumed, but his frail stature and lack of strength may have presented walls (invisible to me) that prevented him from preparing for his debates by doing even minimal research and gathering information. Or he just may not have had access to, or have been unable to use computer resources for research and preparation. He did not ask me for help and, I concluded, had not asked for help from the SSSO. To me, Leonard seemed to represent a failure of the teaching system that could have done more to help him succeed.

But as a matter of fact, Leonard HAD received, or at least had been offered, much more help than I had been aware of. I learned this from his SSSO counselor when she read a draft of this article. She wrote, "Leonard received hours and hours of encouragement and assistance. We had conferences with him and his parents to try to put a plan together for his progress. Although I wasn't his primary counselor, I arranged meetings with instructors prior to his enrolling in their classes so he would know what was expected and could judge his level of comfort in a class." The counselor told me that the SSSO had even encouraged Leonard to get professional help for personal problems that they thought outweighed his physical problems. But Leonard could not/would not ask for help. As the counselor observed, "We aim to provide a foundation of generic
support, but the responsibility is with the student. By law, we must provide equal access; beyond that, there is a maelstrom of individual differences and problems encountered.”

Postscript I

Three students with disabilities: One needed help and got it. One didn't need help. One who needed help, was encouraged to seek help, and didn't. In these stories of three students, I have tried to show that, in a school that is committed to serving students with disabilities, success sometimes hinges not only on how accurately the school and its teachers perceive the extent of a student's disabilities, but on how willing a student is to ask for and use the help available. I have also tried to show that students whose disabilities seem to preclude them from enrolling in academic courses can, with sufficient internal motivation and appropriate external support, do surprisingly well.

Since completing "Personal and Public Speech," Loral has asked me several times to permit her to enroll in "Principles of Speaking," a second-year course in public speaking. Because that course requires students to do extensive research and to master some advanced skills in speech making, I have been reluctant to let her enroll. My concern is that Loral would be over her head and would fail.

But every semester some students who have no apparent physical or mental disabilities enroll in this class, find they are in over their heads, and drop the course. Loral could not do worse than that. Perhaps she could do better. Maybe, with proper academic support from the SSSO and me, Loral should be given the same chance to fail, or succeed, as other students.
NOTES

1. The actual wording of the requirements is "All U.S. high school graduates—or persons who are 18 or older or who have earned a high school diploma or equivalency."


6. "This goal consists of strengthening KCC as a premier resource in Hawaiian, Pacific Island and Asian Programs; recruiting and retaining students, faculty, staff and administrators from under-represented groups and promoting a respect for differences." Kapiʻolani Community College Academic Development Plan 1997-2002, Goal B, Champion Diversity.


8. The absence of the word "disability" from these plans is not insignificant, as a counselor for students with disabilities wrote to me in a private correspondence:

"Because much of our money [for providing services to students with disabilities]
comes from the federal government, we need plans and academic development plans." Not mentioning diversity in these plans could also have significant implications because the Provost's introduction to the Academic Development Plan (ADP) states that "Activities that can be shown to further the priorities outlined in the ADP are likely to receive more support than those which have not been identified by the 1997-2007 Strategic Plan or the 1997-2002 ADP."


13 As stated in the Accreditation Self Study, Kapi`olani Community College, 2000, Standard 5, p. 175.

14 As stated in the Accreditation Self Study, Kapi`olani Community College, 2000, Standard 5, p. 177-78.


17 In a private correspondence, Loral's counselor wrote about her: “[Loral] is really ‘special.’ She has bloomed in every sense. She has a strong support system that also makes a big difference. Through her own persistence, she has made progress in a system that does not routinely recognize individual strengths and differences.”

18 Barbara went on to graduate from the university.