Foreword: Blank Spaces

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://kahualike.manoa.hawaii.edu/horizons/vol2/iss1/1

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On August 13, 1904, an advertisement appeared on page 6 of *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85047084/1904-08-13/ed-1/seq-6/) offering for sale plots of land in the Kalihi Valley. Although all too common for that time, advertisements such as these make no mention of the Kanaka Maoli who were living, gardening, and using those homelands. The implications of historic maps and plot descriptions of these lands as blank spaces is explored in a compelling essay by Kathleen Corpuz, included in this issue of *Mānoa Horizons*. Maps created by the U.S. Geological Survey, such as the one cited in Ms. Corpuz’s study, as well as the map featured on this issue’s cover, similarly project blank spaces where lands were in use by Hawaiʻi’s indigenous people. In addition to serving as evidence for an essay about manifestations of colonialism, these maps and advertisements featuring blank spaces have a strong parallel in the corpus of student works selected for Volume 2 of this journal.

The second annual issue of *Mānoa Horizons* features thirty-five undergraduate student works drawn from a wide range of disciplinary pursuits. Many of the submissions we received during the first (January 2017) and second (May 2017) submission cycles were traditional academic disciplinary research, such as papers, thesis excerpts, research posters, and so forth. However, a number of the submissions we received in both editorial cycles were creative classroom assignments but some were produced outside of the contexts of formal coursework. The Artist Statements that accompany the poetry, short stories, painting, photographs, and video that were ultimately accepted by the Editorial Board reflect the wonderful creativity that our undergraduate students are tapping into, both as students and as human beings undergoing a process of personal growth. I want to draw your attention to this body of works in this essay.

As a faculty member, I encourage my students to draw on personal experiences in their critical analyses and applications of the themes we address in my courses, in their classroom discussions, research papers and presentations. But those intersections between the academic and the personal are developed in and outside of our classes, and they are a fundamental part of what it means to matriculate engaged, thoughtful citizens. A student’s family and friends, employment and travels, interests and hobbies, political and religious leanings, ethnicity and gender are all part of what makes him or her a whole person. While university coursework may engage formally with a set of academic skills (writing, reading, memorization, critical thinking, and so forth), these abilities cannot be divorced from the whole person we seek to educate. The parts of themselves that our students may not share with their professors and peers are not blank spaces, much like an area without structures on a map may be similarly full of life, agricultural or cultural value. Students bring their entire personal histories, biases, interests, and personalities to bear on their coursework in ways that may or may not come to light in their formal academic performance.

When I taught Honors 101 (Introduction to Research and Creative Work at Mānoa), this became obvious to me in ways that it had not been in previous years of teaching undergraduates. I had students from a wide range of backgrounds and with quite different academic interests in each section of HON 101. They came to share much with me and with each other about their families and their academic plans, and how they came to choose pre-med or dance as their intended majors. While those
reasons may matter little when studying for an upcoming exam or researching internship possibilities, they mattered a great deal to those individuals in determining the particular specialties they ultimately chose, the capstone research or creative projects they envisioned, and the steps each thought was necessary to pursue their ideal careers and lives outside the academy. The same ongoing process of personal and professional growth can be witnessed in any undergraduate student whom we take the time to get to know. For example, I have had the privilege of taking groups of students on academic Study Tours to Bolivia and Peru, where daily, sustained contact usually led to the development of a close mentor-mentee relationship. Several of those students have struggled with their indigenous identity when told repeatedly by Quechua and Aymara individuals in the Andes that their relative wealth and good health marked them as white. The questions that those students struggled with—what it means to be indigenous, how that identity plays out differently in various social and political settings, how colonialism has yielded so many different racial structures, etc.—changed how they thought about not just indigeneity as an academic topic, but also their own place in the world. For one, it directly impacted her graduate school plans as well. This is an example of how the whole person functions as a student, whether that involves writing an academic paper or choosing to pursue (or change) a particular major.

Most of what constitutes the whole student may be invisible to faculty and staff in our daily interactions with students, which tend to be proscribed by the professional, often impersonal nature of our formal roles at the university. I encourage my fellow faculty members to seek out opportunities to scratch away at the blank spaces behind those faces, and I want to encourage students to share more of themselves in their interactions with their classmates, professors, administrators and staff members. Each of us is a whole person with interests, histories and experiences that inform our classes and research in ways that can be surprising to others. When visiting professors came to Honors 101 to share their stories, students were inevitably riveted. One memorable visitor shared her tale of being sent through the Amazonian lowlands from Jesuit mission to Jesuit mission in pursuit of documents that, it turned out, were housed at the archives where she started her journey. She was sent on a months-long quest to see if she was “serious” about the work, because as a graduate student, she looked so young. The undergraduate students in my class got a hearty laugh out of the story, but it also came up repeatedly in later discussions about the unexpected trials they faced in settling on a major, determining how to spend their summers, and identifying potential mentors for their own projects. I was left with the distinct impression that they learned as much from personal stories such as this one, as they did from formal instruction in how to conduct research within a discipline of their choosing. I also learned the value of sharing occasional stories from my own background and field experiences with students in my other classes. Sharing my own stories from the field encouraged students to reveal more of themselves in our discussions, and deepened their engagement with the topics we explored together through readings, exams, papers and end-of-semester presentations.

The creative works included in Volume 2 of Mānoa Horizons allude to the beauty, and sometimes deep wells of pain, in the “blank spaces” of our students’ lives. There are richly complex people behind the questions, the emails, the essays and fresh faces that dutifully show up class after class, just as there were people using, connecting with, and sometimes losing access to the ʻāina depicted as blank spaces on those historic maps of our island home. This volume of the journal is simultaneously a celebration of the whole student, whose academic research and creative works make the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa such an inspiring place to be, full of potential and talents. With the addition of those creative expressions, it is also a testament to those whole students whose selves are in the process of being shaped by both academic coursework and personal interactions on and off campus. Volume 2 is dedicated though to the people who live (and have lived) in those blank spaces on our maps, both today and in the past—the sidewalks of Kaka‘ako, the public parks of Tokyo, the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Caracas, the cemeteries of Cairo, and of course, the lands once sold for profit by the colonists of Hawai‘i.

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