



Alison Peck

# Papa ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Kilohōkū\*

**Figure 1.**

*Ka‘iu Kimura,  
Executive Director of  
‘Imiloa, speaking to  
2,000 astronomers  
and students at the  
January 2019 American  
Astronomical Society  
meeting in Seattle,  
Washington.  
Credit: ‘Imiloa  
Astronomy Center*

*Astronomers in Hawai‘i have long embraced Hawaiian culture and traditions, including finding ways to include them in the naming of astronomical discoveries. Now, through a new exciting program, hosted in part at Gemini Observatory, Observatory staff are on their way to better understanding the history and culture that shape the communities in which they live.*



One of the many wonderful aspects of living in Hawai‘i is the strong sense of history and culture that makes these islands unique. Learning more about this culture and how it has shaped the communities we live in is an important goal for most observatory staff, whether they grew up here, have become long-term residents, or are making the most of a short-term position, like an internship or postdoctoral fellowship. In addition to everyday life in the community, we can see the ‘ano nui (importance) of Hawaiian culture through novel astronomy programs such as A Hua He Inoa, a Hawaiian phrase that refers to the practice of calling forth a name. This collab-

orative naming project, led by the ‘Imiloa Astronomy Center in Hilo, Hawai‘i, includes experts in Hawaiian culture, language, and astronomy and aims to weave traditional culture and practices into the process of officially naming astronomical discoveries. In January 2019, Ka‘iu Kimura, Executive Director of ‘Imiloa, was invited to give a lecture about the program at the January 2019 meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Seattle,

\* *Hawaiian language lessons for astronomers*

Washington, which attracted an audience of more than 2,000 astronomers and students.

But not only astronomers work at the observatories, of course. There are engineers, technicians, librarians, accountants, educators and more, many of whom were born here in the islands. Many observatory staff have the opportunity to hear 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) and oli (chants) through their children, who learn about important traditions and mo'olelo (stories) in school, but gaining a more in-depth knowledge and understanding requires a more concerted effort. That's why the 'Imiloa Astronomy Center recently joined forces with the University of Hawai'i at Hilo's (UHH) Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language to provide a weekly class on Hawaiian language and culture to staff from all observatories on Maunakea. The observatories paid the tuition for the 12 week course, and the participants purchased their own textbooks, which they kept after the classes finished.

and the UH Institute for Astronomy (both in Hilo and Mānoa on O'ahu) registering, and attendance and enthusiasm remaining just as high throughout the semester.

In Hilo, the class met in the Lecture Hall at the Gemini North Base Facility, which is optimized for sound quality and ease of class participation. The class was streamed in real-time to sites in Waimea on the Big Island, Mānoa, and even one participant in Iowa, using videoconferencing technology that the observatories have in place to enable scientific collaboration. Although this undertaking was technically challenging at first, after a few learning experiences on the part of the organizers, the class was transmitted smoothly to all sites.

The organizers also recorded each class and made them available to all participants, so that they would not miss anything if they could not attend. This was all made possible by the outstanding skill of kumu (teacher)

**Figure 2.**

*Maunakea observatory staff preparing for the Merrie Monarch parade in April. The Merrie Monarch is a week-long festival that honors the legacy of King David Kalākaua, who inspired the perpetuation of Hawaiian traditions, native language and arts.*

*Credit: East Asian Observatory*



The first class was a bit experimental, as it was difficult to gauge how many people would be able to attend the class every Friday lunchtime, and how many would be able to make time to watch the recordings and practice the lessons on their own if they were traveling or on a night shift. Nevertheless, participation was outstanding with over 100 staff from Maunakea Observatories

Kamalani Johnson (UHH), and his willingness to embrace not only the challenges of distance learning, but also an unusual set of haumāna (students) from all over the globe and all types of jobs, from scientific research and education, to engineering, computer support, and administration. With participants from diverse backgrounds, all levels of proficiency in 'ōlelo Hawai'i, and

**Figure 3.**

*Haumāna Alyssa Grace (left) and Jocelyn Ferrara (middle) present kumu Kamalani Johnson with a photo of the Maunakea observatories signed by several class participants.*

*Credit: Alison Peck (Gemini)*



extremely varied personal and professional interests, one would expect that holding the attention of everyone in the class for 12 weeks would be a challenge. But Kamalani handled it with ease, dividing the class time between stories (legends, place names, traditions, hula) and grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

Participants in the class said they looked forward to Friday lunchtime every week, and were quite sad when the course ended. We at Gemini Observatory are extremely grateful for kumu Kamalani Johnson and to Ka'iu Kimura for their eagerness to lead this initiative, and especially for their willingness to work with the observatories on plans to continue providing these courses for observatory staff who are so grateful to have the opportunity to pursue their careers while also becoming more knowledgeable about the history and culture that shape the communities in which they are privileged to live and work.

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