

PROJECT HO'OKU'I NEWSLETTER



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WELCOMING OUR NEW HO'OKU'I TEAM MEMBERS!

We are excited to welcome the newest members of Project Ho'oku'i's team: Connie Kramer, Naomi Rombaoa Tanaka, Justice Kanaulu, and Matthew Myers!

MEET CONNIE KRAMER - OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

Connie's career path has spanned diverse industries - including television, NASCAR, and hospitality leadership in Hawai'i - before she transitioned into higher education. Reflecting on her decision to join the project, Connie shared, "I applied to work at Ho'oku'i because its mission resonates deeply with my personal and professional values. Having built a career in media, hospitality, and entrepreneurship, I wanted to transition into work centered on service, education, and community impact. Ho'oku'i's focus on empowering Native Hawaiian students through culturally grounded pathways aligns with my commitment to integrity, collaboration, and leadership development." Her vision for Ho'oku'i's future is bold and inspiring: expanded 'āina-based fellowships, stronger postsecondary-to-career pipelines, and opportunities for Native Hawaiian students to thrive as leaders - confident, connected, and impactful on both local and global stages.



MEET NAOMI ROMBAOA TANAKA CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As an Associate Specialist faculty member at the Center on Disability Studies in the College of Education at UHM, Naomi serves as Co-Principal Investigator and Technology Coordinator for Project Ho'oku'i. By bridging research, creativity, and aloha, she designs joyful, meaningful learning experiences that support strengths-based well-being and flourishing among educators, families, and students. Speaking about her involvement with Project Ho'oku'i, Naomi shared, "Youth are our future, and I am grateful to be part of a project that supports their education."

Looking ahead, Naomi envisions a future where Project Ho'oku'i continues to empower students along their college pathways while honoring their unique skills, identities, and aspirations.



MEET JUSTICE KANAULU - EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Justice is an educator who supports high school students and college-going youth through relationship-centered mentoring, academic guidance, and intentional goal setting. As an Educational Specialist, his work focuses on walking alongside students as they navigate school, postsecondary pathways, and personal growth. For Justice, joining Project Ho'oku'i is rooted in his deep commitment to relationships, belonging, and service. As he shared, "I believe meaningful mentorship can be life-changing, and I'm excited to support students in ways that honor their identities, stories, and goals." Justice hopes to see the continued growth of Ho'oku'i as a trusted support system for students across Hawai'i - one that nurtures confidence, resilience, and purpose. He anticipates Ho'oku'i expanding its reach while maintaining the deep, authentic relationships that empower students well beyond their time in the program.



MEET MATTHEW MEYERS - EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Originally from Southwest Virginia, Matthew brings a deeply reflective and service-oriented approach to his work. As an educator, he identifies first as a learner and second as a caregiver, centering the needs of students who require the most support. As an Educational Specialist, his work spans mentoring Undergraduate Scholars, supporting high school interns at Waikalua Loko I'a, and assisting Kumu Justice at Castle High School to provide instruction across Kāne'ohe-based sites. In addition to this fieldwork, he coordinates data for Project Ho'oku'i's O'ahu sites and contributes to program evaluation efforts. Matthew was drawn to Ho'oku'i because of its long-standing history of service through Native Hawaiian Education Program grant funding and the trust it has built with the Lāhui. Looking ahead, he believes that Ho'oku'i is a shining example of culturally relevant education - one that supports not only students' academic success, but also the well-being of the entire community.



UNSUNG HERO: REGAN HONDA

WRITTEN BY: LISA UYEHARA

I met Regan Honda, a college and career counselor at Farrington High School when I was a project coordinator for Project Ho'oku'i II. Upon our first meeting, tired of getting "used" by researchers, he read me the riot act on how things would be. He made it very clear that what was most important to him was how he helped students. Fast forward, 10 years later; He has been an incredible and remarkable partner for Project Ho'oku'i. Regan always recognized our common goal and mindset: to lift students out of the cycle of poverty, show the world the abilities of students with disabilities, support Kānaka Maoli students, and keep Hawaii nei, well, Hawaii nei. We are currently on Project Ho'oku'i VI, funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Together with others, we have graduated approximately 35 Farrington High School seniors with their Associate Degrees prior to finishing high school.

Each year, the number of Associate Degree seniors increases since we focused on this trajectory during the Covid pandemic. We have seen more University of Hawai'i Mānoa scholars over time.

I think most importantly, the smallest details need to be recognized and appreciated. He would pick up books and materials for Farrington students who were project participants when I was unable to do so. He has always adhered to deadlines and made sure any information I needed to know was transmitted to me thoroughly and on time. From getting a pizza (out of his own pocket) for the after school Ho'oku'i participants to always keeping me informed - he has put students on positive paths for life. What I can say ultimately about Mr. Regan Honda is this: "He has a big heart and gives to everyone - students and outsiders a chance. He is a true educator".



REGAN AND FARRINGTON HS AA
DEGREE HOLDERS, CLASS OF 2023

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: OUR UH MĀNOA, UH HILO, AND UH CTE SCHOLARS EMBARK ON THEIR JOURNEY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Our 2025–2026 Project Ho'oku'i first-year post-high scholarship awardees have officially embarked on their higher education journeys at UH Mānoa, UH Hilo, and across the UH Community Colleges. This milestone marks an exciting new chapter, and we look forward to seeing all that the future holds for them. To celebrate, we are proud to showcase some of our outstanding scholars who embody the spirit of Aloha and are dedicated to giving back to their 'āina and 'ohana as they pursue higher education and future careers.

UH MĀNOA SCHOLARS: NOAH ROSENBLOOM AND MIKKEL BEKKUM



NOAH ROSENBLOOM



MIKKEL BEKKUM

Noah Rosenbloom graduated from Kealakehe High School, where he earned numerous academic and athletic awards. He is now pursuing a degree in Computer Science with the goal of becoming a software developer. Looking ahead, Noah hopes that his career in technology will provide him with long-term stability and allow him to achieve his dream of becoming a proud homeowner.

Mikkel Bekkum, a recent graduate of Hāna High School, is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Science with a focus on future medical applications. Growing up in Hāna, where access to healthcare and medical resources is limited, he is committed to using his education to give back to his community. After graduating, he hopes to participate in multiple DNA research programs as part of his journey toward advancing healthcare opportunities for close-knit communities like his own.

UH HILO SCHOLAR: TRYSTIN LUM

Trystin Lum, a proud Kānaka and graduate of Castle High School, is a student-athlete at UH Hilo, where she plays volleyball and is double majoring in Kinesiology and Pre-Nursing. Deeply committed to her community, Trystin aspires to become a neonatal or pediatric psychiatric nurse, working to improve the health and well-being of infants and children in underserved communities across Hawai'i. Guided by the spirit of aloha, she seeks to weave compassion and responsibility into her practice, ensuring that her career in nursing both uplifts her community and honors her cultural values.



TRYSTIN LUM



KILEY MURAKAMI

UH CTE SCHOLAR (WINDWARD & LEEWARD CC): KILEY MURAKAMI

Kiley Murakami, a proud Kānaka and graduate of Castle High School, has begun her studies at Windward & Leeward Community College. She is pursuing an Associate in Science in Sustainable Agriculture, driven by her passion for advancing food sovereignty across the Hawaiian Islands. By strengthening her 'ike in the natural sciences, Kiley hopes to combine academic knowledge with cultural practices to address the root causes of food insecurity in Hawai'i, working toward the goal of ensuring food is homegrown, not flown.

PROJECT HO'OKU'I ANNOUNCEMENTS



- **Competitive Ho'oku'i 2026-2027 Scholarship Applications are now open!**

Ho'oku'i V Link:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqo77z68F421Chndrz0Rbog5Zk2opedD3PFioZFI5lr2KTkw/viewform>

Ho'oku'i VI Link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfih4zFhKIPeOCc8seZVYTNUaP8sPZnOYz2_srhcOYC1K-pdQ/viewform

- **We have posted the Ho'oku'i IV Mentor Manual online on our Ho'oku'i V and IV websites!**

Ho'oku'i IV Mentor Manual Link:

<https://cde.hawaii.edu/hookui5kulia/wp-content/uploads/sites/69/2026/02/Project-Hookui-IV-Mentor-Manual.pdf>