

KAI ULU

HPU Alumni Currents

A Message from Provost Alan Shoho: Engaged Learning at HPU

It is said that “Time is a great teacher, but it demands you change your curriculum.” Over the years, teaching and learning have evolved from a predominantly passive, didactic process into something far more dynamic and participatory. One of the things I have come to appreciate most about Hawai‘i Pacific University is its deep commitment to engaged teaching and learning. What does it look like in practice?

As technology—and especially artificial intelligence continues to reshape how we learn, HPU has embraced this shift in meaningful ways. Here, students are active participants in their own learning. Rather than simply being taught, they engage, explore and apply knowledge in meaningful ways. This emphasis on engaged learning is what sets HPU apart.

This commitment to engaged learning comes to life in classrooms across HPU. Professors Doug Askman and Russell Hart make history come alive when they respectively take their students to Iolani Palace to learn about Hawaiian history or Pearl Harbor to learn about December 7th and WWII. It is these types of engaged learning that separates HPU from other universities. Students aren’t taught by graduate students, but professors who have real life experiences in their academic disciplines. They make learning come alive.



Alan Shoho, Ph.D.,
Senior Vice President and Provost at
Hawai‘i Pacific University

[Full Message](#)

Water Lets the Dreams In

Fermiamoci un momento. Imagine a design company that uses no focus groups and bases its decisions on whether the product will spark joy. Success is not how many units are sold, but rather, did the product brighten your day? This Italian dream factory is not new invention, but over 100 years old, designing over 1,400 products as wide-ranging as a fruit squeezer to a tablet computer (yes, before the iPad).

Alessi.

It's one of the world's most iconic design companies, with a mission to sell you a product you didn't even know you wanted. The only thing you know is that it brings you pure happiness. You may never use that fruit squeezer; its iconic design borrowed from baby octopuses. Anyone at Alessi will all tell you that is the point.



THE CURRENTS

[HPU Graduates Largest Class in Over 20 Years This Spring](#)

[HPU Adds Women's Flag Football, A First in Hawai'i](#)

[Meet HPU's First Cohort of Doctor of Clinical Psychology \(PsyD\) Student Graduates](#)

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Their products are artistic statements, conversation starters for your home, pieces of rare craftsmanship that carry their own story and personality. But in a twist, Alessi's encyclopedic catalog of products are all meant to be used, repeatedly, for a lifetime.



Four generations into Alessi's 105-year existence, the work of pushing boundaries belongs in part to an HPU alumnus who recently came back to a place he has loved for over 20 years.

Luca Alessi, Commercial Director and Head of Business to Business and Strategic Partnerships at Alessi, returned to HPU this spring to speak with business students at Pioneer Plaza and to headline the

HPU Distinguished Speaker Series event.

An hour north of Milan, the plain breaks against the foothills, and they gently rise into the Alps where lakes appear, long fingers of glacial water held between the mountains. The Alessis are from the Italian lake country and have been for generations. This is where the dream was born.

"Where to begin? At the start, of course," Luca said, a smile and laugh filling the room. "I was born in Milan and raised at Lake Maggiore."

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NOTES FROM FACULTY & STAFF

A Message from HPU's English and Applied Linguistics Department

April 21, 2026 was a triple-special day for Dr. Hanh Nguyen, Professor of Applied Linguistics, TESOL Program.

On top of Nguyen's inbox was an email from Justin Pannell (MA TESOL, '18), who just published a paper in TESOL Quarterly, a top-tier journal. The paper, entitled "'Why Can't They Just Stay?' A Critical Conversation and Membership Categorization Analysis of Racial Neoliberalism in English Language Education" was based on Pannell's master's thesis at HPU. Pannell just completed his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania.

Nguyen's first class of the day welcomed another alumnus, Nicole Otero (MA TESOL, '10), as a guest speaker. Otero is currently Associate Professor at Kapi'olani Community College. She shared her experience designing an 'āina-based curriculum that incorporates language skills, content knowledge, and community engagement, which enriched the course with invaluable real-world perspectives.

Between this class and the next, Nguyen had a fun rendezvous with a third alumnus, Isabella Muller (MA TESOL '20). Muller was heading back to Portugal, where she is pursuing a PhD in linguistics while teaching courses in English and Brazilian Portuguese. She shared that everything she learned in the TESOL program at HPU is helping her with her teaching and research.

What a rewarding day!

THE CURRENTS



HPU Graduates Largest Class in Over 20 Years This Spring

HPU celebrated its spring 2026 commencement on May 7 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village Waikiki Beach Resort. A total of 960 students earned their degrees. Graduates represented a wide range of programs, from dual-credit associate degree students who earned college credits while in high school to doctoral candidates, highlighting the breadth of HPU's academic offerings.

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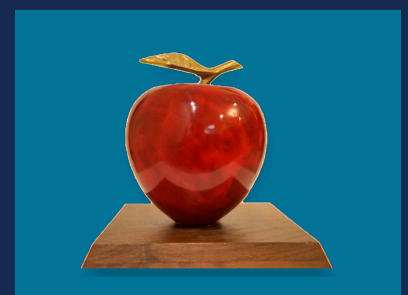
HPU Adds Women's Flag Football, A First in Hawai'i

HPU will launch women's flag football this fall, becoming the first university in Hawai'i to offer the sport at the collegiate level. The addition marks a milestone for college sports in



Meet HPU's First Cohort of Doctor of Clinical Psychology (PsyD) Student Graduates

HPU marked a historic milestone at its spring 2026 commencement with the graduation of its first cohort of PsyD students. The program



Faculty and Staff Honored with Golden Apple Awards

HPU's Master of Science in Construction Management is Hawai'i's only construction management program, delivered online with

Hawai'i and aligns with the sport's rapid national growth, including its recent designation as an NCAA Emerging Sport for Women.

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emphasizes small cohort sizes, individualized mentorship, and close academic support rarely found in doctoral training.

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optional hybrid course sections. The program features accelerated eight-week semesters and can be completed in as few as 12 months.

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

HPU Alumnus Ephraim Botulan '06: All The Right Moves



The drones rise together off the launch pad, thousands of them, climbing in formation until they hang in the night air like a held breath. Then they begin to move. A honu (turtle) swims across the sky. A surfer drops into a wave. A company logo assembles itself dot by dot, 300 feet above the crowd, and the people on the ground tilt their heads back and forget, for a moment, to take out their phones.

Alumni Involvement

The HPU alumni 'ohana is worldwide, all opportunities are available in-person or virtually. We encourage you to consider how you can contribute your time and talents to support our students. Your involvement can have a lasting impact on student personal and professional growth.

HPU Connect

HPU Connect makes it easy to get in touch with fellow alumni and support current students. Every HPU member adds value and prestige to our community.

[Sign Up Today!](#)

Career Connections

Whether you're exploring options for the future or simply curious, our online tools will help you reflect on what matters most, explore giving possibilities, and take the next step, with aloha.

HPU alumnus Ephraim Botulan '06 is a co-pilot for [Sky Elements Hawai'i](#), the state's only drone light show outfit, formed when his own drone venture merged with Sky Elements, the largest drone show operation in the country. The drones are small, quiet, and choreographed by a central computer that flies each one along a precise path while its onboard LEDs cycle through programmed colors. A show begins as a storyboard, becomes an animation set to music, and ends as a piece of sky theater that leaves no smoke, no shell casings, and no startled dogs. In a place as ecologically conscious as Hawai'i, where fire risk is real and seabirds are easily disoriented by light and sound, the appeal is obvious. A drone show tells a story. Fireworks just make noise and are an environmental concern.

Drones are just one piece of Botulan's impressive portfolio. Since going full-time on his own ventures in September 2025, he has been building three ventures at once: the drone work, a consulting practice called [Zenshin Group](#), and a minority stake in a downtown sushi restaurant. Twenty years in Hawai'i's marketing world brought him to this point, but the path was not a departure from anything. It was an arrival.

Ask Botulan what holds all of it together, and the answer is two words: loyalty and integrity. They are the through line of his career, and he traces them back to HPU.

Botulan grew up in Kalihi, the son of parents who encouraged their two boys early on to consider healthcare. His father has worked in the maintenance and engineering department at the Hyatt Regency since 1992. His mother is a CNA at a state hospital. Botulan went to St. John the Baptist for middle school and then to Moanalua High School, where he found his way into the media program and discovered he liked the seam where creativity meets commerce. "I gravitated towards media, marketing," he says. "I was able to mix the creativity of media and the sales and hustle of marketing. I really enjoyed that balance."

When it came time to choose a college, he had options. USC accepted him, but the price was excessive. He looked at UCLA, Loyola Marymount, Concordia, and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. What sold him on HPU was a combination of money, place, and mission: a Spirit Club scholarship covered half his tuition, and after two years as a coordinator he earned a full ride. The campus was downtown, in the center of the business district, walking distance from the offices where Hawai'i's CEOs actually worked.

"HPU is in the heart of downtown," he says. "You are among real business leaders. I was able to have a part-time job downtown while earning my marketing degree. Being able to work at a company and walk to your classes is really something special and unique about HPU."

[Full Article](#)

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Planned Giving

Whether you're exploring options for the future or simply curious, our online tools will help you reflect on what matters most, explore giving possibilities, and take the next step, with aloha.

[Learn More Here!](#)

HPU Athletics

Learn more about our teams, game schedules, standout student-athletes, and how you can support HPU Athletics all season long.

[Learn More Here!](#)

Upcoming Events:

How to Create Your "Perfect" Work featuring Renessa Boley Layne

Tuesday, June 9
9:00 a.m. PDT

[More Info Here](#)

Fixing Fairness: A New Path Forward for DEI featuring Lily Zheng

Thursday, June 26
9:00 a.m. PDT

[More Info Here](#)

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