

KAI ULU

HPU Alumni Currents

A Message from Dean Carrie Jones: Our Vibrant HPU STEM Community

Aloha HPU Alumni,

As Acting Dean of the College of Natural and Computational Sciences, I'm delighted to share the latest updates from our vibrant HPU STEM community.

This fall, as HPU celebrates 60 years of innovation and excellence, we honor the remarkable achievements of our faculty, students, and alumni, whose work continues to shape science, education, and conservation—not just here in Hawai'i, but around the world.

Everywhere I turn, I see the impact of our CNCS 'ohana.

You're out there leading research, mentoring young scientists, protecting ecosystems, and finding creative solutions to global challenges. Staying connected with you reminds us why we do what we do—it's about people, relationships, and a shared commitment to making a difference.



Carrie Jones,
Acting Dean of the College of
Computational and Natural
Sciences
at Hawai'i Pacific University

[Full Message](#)

The Odyssey of a Chemist: Professor Horgen

It's midday in Honolulu. A baby bird that HPU Professor David Horgen, Ph.D., found on his walk up Fort Street one morning is healing from its injuries in a cage behind his desk, its steady chirp echoing the deepest forests of the Amazon. Sunlight sneaks into his office and across the floor, and Horgen leans back at his desk, ready to share his extraordinary story of how he came to this life as a professor of chemistry at HPU. It was not always a clear path, and at times it seemed there was no path at all.



Horgen has taught and mentored many determined students who have gone on to prestigious universities across the globe to earn medical degrees, Ph.D.s, and other advanced STEM degrees. He has also educated students who were just like him: earnest, a little lost, trying to find their way through a confusing world. A Division I baseball player who traded cleats for the open road, Horgen lived a restless youth that ultimately led him to academia in the Pacific. His story speaks to students searching for meaning and direction at a highly formative age.

Born in Hollywood, Florida, just 10 miles from Fort Lauderdale, Horgen was raised in a close-knit family steeped in sports and education. He grew up near Cocoa Beach, in the shadow of the Kennedy Space Center, and something in the air there sparked his imagination to dream of travel and the limitless possibilities in life.

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THE CURRENTS

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Message from Coach Jenic and the HPU Women's Volleyball Team:



Aloha Shark Fans!

This is the 7th year our HPU Volleyball team will be joining [The Side-Out Foundation](#) to raise funds for breast cancer and be a part of its [Dig Pink® program](#). We would love your help to make our campaign successful! Our Dig Pink match this year will be on **October 26 at the Shark Tank against Concordia University Irvine at 3pm** . Come out, wear your best pink, and support us as we play for a great cause!

Funds raised for Side-Out go toward a clinical trial specifically for patients with stage 4 breast cancer, the most advanced form of the disease and the least funded area of research.

Thank you so much for helping us to make an impact and a special mahalo from HPU Women’s Volleyball Team!



THE CURRENTS



HPU's Occupational Therapy Program Hosts Second Annual 'Go-Baby-Go' Event

Doctor of Occupational Therapy students collaborated with Doctor of Physical Therapy and engineering students to customize six ride-on cars for local children with disabilities. The modified vehicles promote early independent mobility, play, and social participation. The second annual Go-Baby-Go event took place on October 3 at HPU’s Graduate College of Health Sciences.

[Learn More](#)



Hangin’ at the Reef: Professor Britos Interview

In this podcast episode, HPU Vice President Jeffrey Rich sits down with filmmaker, professor, and author Peter Britos, Ph.D., to explore the evolving landscape of Hawai’i’s film industry. From cultural authenticity and local representation to the role of AI in media, they discuss how storytelling can challenge dominant narratives and inspire new futures.

[Watch Now](#)



Faculty Emeritus Schoolland’s Summer Travels

It was another busy summer for HPU Faculty Emeritus Ken Schoolland, who retired in August 2025 but remains affiliated with the University. He traveled across China, Argentina, and Japan to present on topics including the economics of moral hazard, free trade, and taxes and redistribution.

[Click Here](#)



Faculty Emerita Kirschenmann Selected for U.S. Department of State Fellowship

Jean Kirschenmann, HPU Instructor Emerita in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, has been awarded a 10-month U.S. Department of State fellowship at the University of Jan Kochanowski in Kielce, Poland. She will teach English and teacher development courses, similar to those she taught at HPU for more than 30 years.

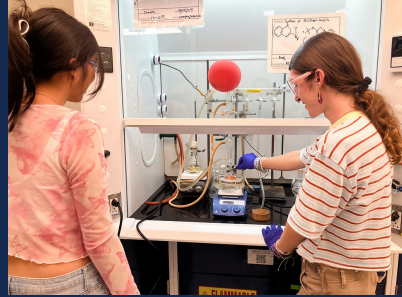
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HPU Center for Academic Success Staff Presents at National Conference

On October 3, HPU's Center for Academic Success (CAS) team—Director Joseph Barnett, Student Retention Counselor Dexter Asuncion, and Student Retention Specialist Erica Chun—presented their ongoing work to a national audience of student success professionals at the 32nd National Conference on Students in Transition, hosted by the University of South Carolina.

[Read More](#)



HPU Receives \$243k Grant for Metals Separations Research

HPU received a \$243,780 National Science Foundation grant to advance rare earth metal research and give undergraduates hands-on lab experience. Led by Dr. Kimberly Mullane, the project explores new light-based methods to separate critical materials used in modern technology. Learn how HPU students are driving innovation in the heart of Honolulu.

[Learn More](#)

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

HPU Alumna Samantha Avina ‘17: The Science of Firsts



When HPU alumna Samantha Avina, Ph.D., chose HPU for her undergraduate studies, she had never set foot in Hawai‘i. The leap felt bold and a little surreal, an ocean away from La Puente, California, Avina’s parents urged her right away to go and explore. "Have an adventure," her father, Joseph said. A first-generation college student, Avina understood that every step would ripple beyond herself. What began as a single boarding pass soon became a family milestone. The first bachelor’s degree, and now, in 2025, the first Ph.D.

Raised in La Puente and a graduate of La Puente High School, Avina always asked why. She loved science and the sea, and early on she imagined a life shaped by both.

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

Networking, mentorship opportunity, and continued involvement with the HPU campus.

[Learn More Here!](#)

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.

“Growing up, my parents impressed on me how much education mattered,” she said. “There were a lot of firsts for me. My family always knew the importance of education, and they encouraged me early on to go to college. I fell in love with science at a very early age and was proactive in looking for resources and opportunities to pursue a college degree.”

A high school history teacher mentioned HPU in class one day, and suddenly the map broadened across the horizon. Avina weighed a nearby California option against the unknown. Her father surprised her with a challenge. Try something new, so she chose HPU.

“When I landed in Honolulu, I thought, my goodness, I get to live here for four years. Wow!” The transition was made even easier by the strong HPU community. A music scholarship and a flute seat in the HPU band gave her instant friends and a daily rhythm. The small classes and close-knit campus helped the first-gen unknowns feel navigable and soon Hawaii felt like a second home.

Academically, she arrived for marine biology. The ocean had always been magnetic, but the coursework opened another route of possibilities. “Some of the classes in marine biology... I have to admit, I struggled with a little,” Avina said with a chuckle, “and I felt that I had more of a knack for molecular biology. I eventually switched to biochemistry, and that worked out really well for me.” That pivot became a bridge, turning curiosity about ecosystems into a fascination with life at the cellular scale.

On that bridge stood a mentor who would change her trajectory: HPU Professor of **Chemistry David Horgen, Ph.D.** Avina first met him in an organic chemistry class. “Not my strongest subject,” she laughed, “yet his energy and care made the science sing. Oh my goodness, Dr. Horgen played such a big role in my life. When students see that professors care about you, it makes the coursework more engaging and exciting. I knew early on that I wanted to work with him and do research in his lab. He took the time to teach me to be a scientist, how to take proper notes and be thorough.”

That lab experience led to her first poster presentation at a research symposium, another first that anchored her identity as a scientist. Like many first-generation students, Avina balanced ambition with budgets. When that budget tightened, Horgen phoned with a soft push: apply for scholarships. She hesitated; he insisted. In 2017, Avina nominated Horgen (and garnered support from fellow classmates) to be HPU Teacher of the Year, which he was awarded at the commencement ceremony that fall.

“Having someone who will push you to invest in your career is monumental,” Avina said. “From that application, I got an internship, which led to the following internship, which then led me to apply for my Ph.D.” Alongside Horgen, HPU Associate Professors Gideon Berger, Ph.D., and Yongli Chen, Ph.D., also helped steady her footing in the sciences and made a big impact on her career. Those fibers of mentorship stitched together opportunity after opportunity after opportunity.

[Full Article](#)

[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:

Dig Pink with HPU Women's Volleyball

Sunday, October 26th

3:00 p.m. HST

The Shark Tank

2707 Pamoia Road, Honolulu, HI

[More Info Here](#)



Demystifying AI Agents: A Beginners Guide for Every Professional

Thursday, November 6th

9:00 a.m. PST

[More Info Here](#)

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