

**THE EARLY DAYS OF ECONOMICS AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, 1907-1962**

By

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From its opening as a College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in 1907, the University of Hawaii has offered courses in economics. Reporting to the College's temporary quarters adjacent to McKinley High School, a 1-to-3-member faculty, urgently recruited from Cornell University and from local schools, found that they were stretched thin to teach the range of curriculum offered. The Prospectus of the new school promised not only vocational courses in agriculture and mechanics, but also courses "to promote the liberal . . . education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life."

As part of that liberal education, the College catalog for 1907 listed a three-credit course in Economics, offered in both semesters, described as including English and American economic history, as well as the principles of political economy. English Instructor Mildred Yoder taught Hawaii's first course in Economics, working outside the field of her academic specialization, as did many of her fellows in those early years of UH. So it went even after the College moved to its Manoa campus and then in 1920 became the University of Hawaii. Coping with growth in the number of students and courses, UH routinely

continued to ask faculty members to teach subjects in which they had no graduate degree.

For Economics during the early and middle 1920s, a half-dozen courses are listed in the annual catalogs: Introduction to Economics, Money & Banking, Practical Banking, Public Finance, Labor, and Transportation. With but few exceptions, all were taught by Romanzo Adams, an eminent scholar who gained distinction as Hawaii's first sociologist. His academic title was Professor of Economics and Sociology. Indeed, while teaching economics, Adams was also listed as teaching all four courses offered in sociology.

Growth in the number of students, courses and teachers gradually allowed a closer linkage between subject matter and faculty specialization. An accumulation of "Commerce" or "Business" courses in the 1930s made it possible to offer a baccalaureate in Business, its curriculum including courses in Economics. At the close of the 1930s, a Master's degree in Business & Economics was added. A group of faculty members formed, with titles like "Professor of Economics & Business" or "Professor of Business & Economics"-- depending on whether they taught such courses as Principles of Economics or Principles of Accounting, and the like. Officed together in Hawaii Hall, these teachers functioned as a loose-jointed department within the College of Arts & Sciences. It was chaired by Merton K. Cameron, (Ph.D. Harvard, 1921), Professor of

Economics & Business. Flexibility of course assignments was still there, so that some faculty members taught outside their fields of specialization as the need arose, but increasingly one could function within the range of his (women economists were yet to come to the campus) interest and experience.

In his recollections of the 1930s, Willard Wilson—at various times dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, dean of faculties, vice-president and acting president of the University—remembered these men as the notable UH economists of that decade:

In economics, the strident and authoritarian voice of Merton Cameron resounded across the Old Quad; but he was seconded by Harold Hoflich, later of the universities of California, and William Taylor, who was to go on and make a controversial but brilliant record in Washington in the field of international public finance.¹

Of those three it was Cameron who endured at Manoa, lecturing to his many classes in a manner and voice that remained highly distinctive. Remembering the Manoa campus as it was just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, alumnus Thomas Gill (later Hawaii legislator, lieutenant governor, and U.S. representative) wrote:

One quirkish memory is a course I never took— but heard in part. It was a course in economic principles, taught for many years by the same professor, for which ‘crib notes’ were widely available. The professor had

¹ *Professor’s Briefcase: Wit & Wisdom of Willard Wilson* (privately printed), p. 8.

a loud voice, easily heard by students sitting outside the classroom on the Quadrangle lawn. The lecture followed the crib notes, seemingly word for word. Where the notes were underlined to mark a key phrase, the voice grew louder; where they were doubly underlined, the voice doubled in volume. Many found it easier to sit on the lawn, listening to and reading the notes while relaxing, than to sit in class.²

Cameron was still chairman of the department in December 1941 when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the U.S. Army moved onto the Manoa campus. He moved from Hawaii Hall to the Social Science Building (now George Hall), along with Associate Professor Ralph Hoeber, as the military draft and resignations to take war-related jobs reduced the Econ-Business faculty from seven to four. Nevertheless, Hoeber taught a new course, Econ 266 "War Economics"; it was re-titled "War & Postwar Economic Problems" in 1944, when peace seemed to be near.

The opening of the new College of Business Administration in September 1950 administratively separated the Business faculty from the Economics faculty, which remained as a separate department within the College of Arts & Sciences. Several faculty members continued to teach in both disciplines. One example was Dean Harold Roberts, who taught labor economics in the Economics Department, as well as other labor courses in his own new College. Similarly, Associate Professor Lee Glover, who chaired the Economics Department in 1955-

² R. Kamins & R. Potter, *Malamalama: A History of the University of Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, p. 45.

Kaimens, *Early Days of Economics at UH*, p. 5.

56, was also listed among the Business faculty. Easy connection in their neighboring offices in Hawaii Hall between the two faculties remained until 1961, when the staff and most members of the Economics Department moved across Varney Circle to their new quarters in Spalding Hall. Distance, however, soon led to separation in function. The UH General Catalog for 1962-63 shows that the faculty of the Economics Department no longer included any members of the Business Administration teaching staff. Nor were any Business courses listed among the offerings in Economics. The two disciplines had gone their separate ways.

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