

Celebrating 25 Years of Philippine Studies in Hawaii

By Jenny Duhaylonsod and Dean Alegado

Among the things that come to mind when people think about Hawaii are Waikiki's white beaches and golden sunsets, the North Shore's surfing contests over 5-foot high waves, the swaying bodies of hula dancers, gorgeous flower leis, red-hot lava flows from the Big Island's Kilauea volcano, Hawaii 5-0, Magnum PI, Benny Agbayani, and Ben Cayetano, the first Filipino-American governor in the U.S., not necessarily in that order.

Most people don't think about the University of Hawaii and its flagship campus on Manoa valley. Once in a while, they'll remember that UH has nationally-ranked men's and women's volleyball teams, as well as a revitalized football team under charismatic coach June Jones.

"How can students study in paradise, so close to Waikiki and the beautiful beaches?" is a common comment especially from visitors. The implication is that UH is not viewed as a serious academic institution because there are too many distractions and students are unable to concentrate.

The University of Hawaii at the Crossroads of Asia-Pacific

The perception may be right on one level but it's mostly wrong. In fact UH is a serious research university which astounded the world a couple of years ago with the successful cloning of mice by a team of scientists headed by Prof. Ryuzo Yanagimachi. And many of its academic programs, such as the earth and ocean sciences, rank among the top in the nation.

Founded in 1907 as an agricultural college during Hawaii's plantation era, UH is now one of only 12 American universities designated as land-, sea- and space-grant institutions. The university now offers baccalaureate degrees in 89 fields, masters in 87 and doctorates in 55. Professional degrees are offered in wide-ranging fields from the more

traditional law and medicine to the newer areas of computer science and biosystems engineering.

Because of its strategic location in the middle of the Pacific, the university is internationally known for having the most extensive academic resources on Asia and the Pacific region. About 450 of its faculty have been identified as having the expertise to teach or do research on Asian, Hawaiian and Pacific studies in various departments and programs. The university created the School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies (SHAPS) in 1987 to focus its strength on the study of Japan, China, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, the Pacific islands, and Hawaii. This strength is complemented by the Asia Collection, one of the finest and most extensive libraries on Asia in the nation.

Philippine Studies at UH

The University of Hawaii at Manoa can claim another distinction in the area of academic excellence. It has the only Center for Philippine Studies with a comprehensive academic program of instruction, research and service in the whole North America. As part of SHAPS, Philippine Studies was established initially as Program following an Act of the Hawaii State Legislature to recognize the contributions of Filipino immigrants to the history and development of the state.

"But even before the legislative mandate, UH already had several well-known academics on the faculty whose expertise, coupled with its rich library collection, could make for a real beginning in Philippine Studies," recalls Belinda Aquino, the Center's long-time founding director. A Cornell Ph.D., Aquino is an internationally-recognized authority on contemporary Philippine politics. She headed a committee in 1974 to develop an integrated program devoted to the study of the Philippines and Filipinos overseas. Other Philippine faculty or administrative staff at UH at the time, such as Ricardo Trimillos, Michael Forman, Benedict Kerkvliet, Amefil Agbayani, Teresita Ramos, Robert Stauffer, and James Misajon, among others, helped to formulate the program. Dean Alegado later joined the faculty to teach the first course on Filipinos in Hawaii at the Ethnic Studies Program.

The Center's First-Rate Instructional Faculty

It is to be noted that the faculty of the Center are not located in the Center itself but in the different departments offering the Philippine-related courses. In short, Philippine Studies on this campus is a decentralized program but pulled together at the Center for visibility and instructional support.

“We have faculty who specialize in the Philippines in many departments, such as political science, history, languages, literature, linguistics, anthropology, music, business administration, geography, and Filipinos in Hawaii,” explains Trimillos, another internationally known Philippine ethnomusicology professor, who currently chairs the Asian Studies Program. Trimillos, who got his Ph.D. from UCLA, teaches a course on Philippine culture and has collaborative projects with universities in the U.S., Europe and the Philippines. “This diversity of faculty specializations on the Philippines and Filipinos,” he continues, “contrasts with many other universities on the mainland where only one or two people on the whole campus are doing Philippine studies.”

According to Aquino, there are about 30 courses in different departments that are wholly or substantially devoted to the Philippines/Filipinos. But there are more than 80 courses that have at least 25 percent Philippine or Filipino-American content. Philippine Studies is enriched by the presence of another unit on campus, the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, which receives federal grants to promote studies on the countries encompassed by Southeast Asia, including the Philippines.

A rich resource is the teaching of Filipino/Tagalog and Ilokano at the Department of Hawaiian and Indo-Pacific Languages, which draws about 300 students, mostly Filipino-Americans, every semester. Teresita Ramos introduced a Philippine languages program in the department starting with Tagalog, which now has four levels. Ramos, who got her Ph.D. in Linguistics from UH, has written a number of books on Tagalog. She has developed the Advanced Filipino Abroad Program (AFAP), which is now on its eighth year. It is intended to provide opportunities for teachers and students to learn the Filipino language in a Philippine setting, such as Los Baños. In 1999, AFAP received a federal grant of \$141,000 for three summers.

In time Ilokano was offered and Precy Espiritu was hired to teach it. "A major reason for teaching Ilokano is the fact that at least 80 percent of the Filipino community in Hawaii is of Ilokano ancestry," says Espiritu. "As more of them attend college, they realize they need to know more about their ethnic roots."

Today, students have formed their own organizations based on the language they take. The Tagalog one is called *Katipunan*, and the Ilokano, *Timpuyog*. They feel more confident about their ethnicity than their counterparts in earlier generations. They are known in academic circles as "heritage students."

The Tagalog and Philippine literature program was augmented in recent years by the addition of multi-awarded poet Ruth Elynia Mabanglo, who is now enshrined in the Palanca Hall of Fame. She also advises *Katipunan*. Josie Paz Clausen, who did her doctoral dissertation on the Ilokano language, was also hired to teach courses on Ilokano language and literature.

This strength in Philippine languages is enhanced by two linguistics professors who have long-standing ties with Philippine academia. Forman, mentioned earlier, obtained his Ph.D. at Cornell and is an expert in *Kapampangan* and *Chavacano* (or *Zamboangueño*). He was one of the first Peace Corps Volunteers in the Philippines. Lawrence Reid, who did his doctoral degree at Hawai'i, became an authority on Austronesian languages. He has done extensive research on Bontok, Ivatan and other Philippine languages.

Research fellows at the East-West Center, a federal institution established in Hawaii in 1960, also teach some of the Philippine courses. Peter Xenos, who got his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, has taught courses on Philippine sociology and demography. He is a productive scholar on population issues. Gerard Finin, a Ph.D. product of Cornell, occasionally teaches selected Philippine topics, such as the Ilocos and Cordillera. He does research on Filipinos in the Pacific islands.

"I think the library resources for Philippine Studies at UH are really among the best in the world," asserts Forman. Finin agrees. "The ability to do research here as a result of these very important library resources is unparalleled. There is no place in the U.S. that has library holdings for Philippine Studies like UH Manoa." Between 1927 and

1997, there have been 150 doctoral dissertations and 154 masters theses on Philippine topics, one-third of which were written by Filipino graduate students.

Alice Mak serves as the Philippine librarian at Asia Collection, and she estimates that there are nearly 13,000 Philippine library titles, which can compete in quality and scope with the more established universities like Cornell and Michigan. The Center also benefits from the presence on campus of the very competent Philippine bibliographer Shiro Saito, who retired a few years ago.

Diminishing Resources

Aquino bewails the fact that many of the earlier faculty have retired, resigned or passed on, but have not been replaced due to budget cuts, which, in turn, are due to Hawaii's sluggish economy in the past decade. Among such departing faculty were Ben Kerkvliet and Robert Stauffer, who taught courses on Philippine politics and development; Ruben Alcantara, who handled a Filipino subcultures course; Tomas Hernandez, who taught Philippine drama and directed plays; Elias Ramos of the College of Business Administration; and Wilhelm Solheim II, a noted specialist in Philippine archaeology. The Center has also lost some staff positions.

Fortunately, a new Ph.D. from Wisconsin, Vina Lanzona, was recently hired to teach Philippine history, replacing Vicente Rafael, who moved on to San Diego. Lanzona wrote an interesting dissertation on women in the Huk movement. Another new hire is Ric Baldoz, also a new Ph.D. in Sociology from SUNY Binghamton. He is a California Filipino-American whose father was an immigrant from Santa Maria, Ilocos Sur.

"We really need to nurture and develop the next generation of Philippine and Filipino-American Studies scholars," stresses Aquino. In the next five to ten years, many of the current faculty will retire or find new things to do. "That's why the 'new blood' infusion to the ranks with the hiring of Lanzona and Baldoz is such a welcome development," she adds.

The Center's International Role

One of the major achievements of the Center is the intellectual leadership role it has developed in promoting international Philippine Studies. It has hosted two highly

successful international conferences attended by 400 of the best scholars in the field from all over the world. There are now Philippine Studies associations in Australia, Japan, Southeast Asia, mainland U.S, Europe, and even in the Philippines itself. The Center functions as the secretariat of the International Philippine Studies Committee whose main charge is to determine who will host the international conferences. The sixth one was held in Manila in July 2000 and the Netherlands will host the next one in 2004.

Since its inception the Center has also hosted prominent Filipino leaders and academics as guest speakers, visiting professors, exchange faculty or researchers, and official guests. In 1995 then President Fidel Ramos was a guest in the signing of the renewal academic exchange agreement between the Center and the University of the Philippines. Senator Jovito Salonga has been a speaker or guest of the Center over the years. Former President Cory Aquino will be the UH commencement speaker in December 2000.

Among the visiting writers, scholars, and professors, have been the late NVM Gonzalez and Bienvenido Santos, S. P. Lopez, Jose Abueva, Francisco Nemenzo, Doreen Fernandez, Reynaldo Iletto, Mahar Mangahas, Randy David, Maria Cynthia Bautista, Ledivina Cariño, Carolina Hernandez, Eric Gamalinda, Epifanio San Juan, Jessica Hagedorn, Bonifacio Salamanca, Maria Luisa Carino, Virginia Miralao, Gemino Abad, Virgilio Enriquez, Ruby Paredes, Michael Cullinane, and others too numerous to mention.

A Tradition of Philippine Cultural Performances

Another achievement of note that the Center can be proud of is its having developed a tradition of presenting plays and cultural performances utilizing the top talents in Philippine theater and drama. In 1989, the Center staged *Immigration Blues*, a bittersweet play on *Pinoys* in America in the 1930s. It was directed by Tony Mabesa. Another major production that year was Nicanor Tiongson's *Pilipinas Circa 1907*, a *zarzuela* set at the turn of the century, also directed by Tony Mabesa. It was a hit with the Filipino community, especially because the leading lady, Marilou Sadiua, a Hawaii resident at the time, was a former Miss Philippines.

In 1991 Behn Cervantes directed *Istorya ni Bonipasyo- Kasla Gloria ti Hawaii* (Bonifacio's Story - Hawaii is Like Paradise) to mark the 85th anniversary of Filipino

immigration to Hawaii. It was adapted from Virgilio Felipe's master's thesis on the life of an early *manong* on Hawaii's sugar plantations.

In recent years, playwright and director Chris Millado has been coming to Hawaii as visiting fellow, and he has directed *avante-garde* plays like *Nikimalika* and *peregriNasyon*. Both plays have also been staged in San Francisco, Chicago and New York. They involve Filipino experiences in America, and *Nikimalika* is especially memorable for its colorful ethnic costumes and sets.

The Center and Political Activism

Another of the Center's claims to fame was its role in the anti-martial law movement in the 70s and 80s, which helped to topple the Marcos dictatorship in the now famous People Power Revolution at EDSA in 1986. Even before it was formally established, the Center put out one of the first newsletters against martial law, which was named *Pahayag* in December 1972. Faculty and supporters sent letters to Congress or to the media, and demonstrated in public, urging the U.S. policymakers to stop giving military aid to Marcos. The Center also organized seminars and workshops in the community to educate the public about the issues in the Philippines under martial law, such as the violation of human rights, censorship, corruption and cronyism, military abuses, repression, torture and disappearance of citizens, and Imelda's extravagance.

During the four-day EDSA Revolution in 1986, faculty and supporters of Philippine democracy monitored the developments in Manila, and were one of the first to announce to Hawaii and mainland residents that Marcos had been overthrown. There was a touch of irony to this whole thing because Marcos fled for his life to Hawaii. "Well, I guess," Aquino remembers herself as saying then, "the revolution must go on." The Center at that time was in a tense situation with the Marcos loyalists in Hawaii, who provided refuge to the exiled dictator, but this is another story altogether.

After 25 Years

The Center has come a long way, as the saying goes. When it was first launched in the early 70s, only less than 3 percent of the student body on Manoa was of Filipino ancestry. Now it's about 10 percent on the Manoa campus, and as high as 25 percent in

some of the community colleges like Leeward. These figures are not bad in terms of reflecting the overall Filipino population in the state, which is 15 percent of the total. And the Center is now known nationally and internationally.

As part of its 25th anniversary observance, the Center invited Mona Lisa Yuchengco, *Filipinas Magazine* publisher, as the 2000 Macaulay Distinguished Lecturer in Asian Studies, to talk about Philippine publishing in America. The lecture series is hosted by the Center every so often. The last speaker in 1988 was then Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani, who spoke on the U.S. military bases in the Philippines.

Virgie Chattergy, professor of Education at UH and originally from Cebu, has only words of praise for the Center's performance. She says, "We are certainly proud of the fact that the Center has done extremely well even under adverse situations. It has been the source of informed comment and analysis of profound issues involving the Philippines and Filipinos. The leadership is excellent and it has accomplished so much in terms of promoting Philippine Studies not only on this campus but elsewhere."

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