

Long on weeds, short on funds

A losing battle at UH Manoa

By JANE EVINGER
Advertiser University Writer

The University of Hawaii's Manoa campus is like a potentially attractive woman with a dirty face and a slip that shows.

Buildings are dirty inside and often out. Weeds grow high on much of the 307 acres they occupy, and expensive landscaping installed around new buildings quickly deteriorates for lack of care and fertilizer.

The 193-member facilities management staff charged with keeping the campus in good repair fights a losing battle.

"WE'RE IN a crisis management situation — you point out the crisis and we'll try to manage it," says Phillip W. Koehler, facilities management director.

The reason is a lack of money and staff.

Koehler's staff today is the same size it was when he became director in 1956, yet his crews now must take care of about four million square feet of buildings — double the 1956 figure — as well as the grounds.

Allowing for inflation, he calculates that the campus is receiving only a third of the maintenance money per square foot that it received in 1956.

"We were getting \$1.20 to maintain each square foot of building in 1956 and we're now getting 80 cents," says Koehler. "But the cost of living has risen about 50 per cent in that period."

AS FOR staff, he says that according to the Association of Physical Plant Administrators, an international organization, "we should have about 400 or 450 people to maintain a campus this size."

Koehler says, "I'm ashamed of the appearance of the campus. About five years ago we had it looking pretty good, but every year since it has gone downhill."

"We used to have two crews cut weeds and they got around twice a year, but now we have one crew so we get around once a year."

"As for the cleanliness of the buildings, right now the custodians can only do about 40 per cent of what's standard. Our priority is to get the restrooms first and then try to do what we can. The classrooms are filthy and the offices are bad because of dust accumulating from construction."

"Most of the faculty are very understanding, and a lot of them are cleaning their own offices."

KOEHLER SAYS, "The problem is that we keep getting new buildings but no more people or money to maintain them. I feel that for every new building, the maintenance budget should be increased by so many dollars per square foot."

"What bothers me is that we're not doing a good job of maintaining these multimillion-dollar buildings, and if you don't do preventive maintenance, it costs much more later."

Koehler's office this year is operating on \$3.2

million. Of that salaries account for \$1.6 or \$1.7 million and utilities about \$1.5 million, "so we don't have anything left to buy paint, or fertilizer or lumber, or to replace broken equipment," he says.

The continuing lack of equipment money has brought increasingly frequent breakdowns of older equipment.

"FOR EXAMPLE, we have two garbage trucks and one is always up for repairs. They're 12 or 15 years old," he says.

Lack of funds for termite-proofing of electrical cables has caused breakdowns and made it necessary to replace some cables.

"And we've practically stopped termite-proofing the older buildings, because we don't have any money," he says.

Building exteriors formerly were painted each seven years, "but for three years now we haven't painted exteriors except for those funded by somebody else, such as the East-West Center buildings that are federally funded," says Koehler.

Koehler's staff includes one air-conditioning mechanic who is hard-pressed just to maintain the

1,000-plus window units on the campus, he says.

The central air-conditioning units in the newer buildings are serviced on a contract basis, at a cost of about \$250,000 a year.

KOEHLER is trying to get State approval to set up his own shop with four full-time civil service air-conditioning mechanics, a move he estimates would save about \$100,000 a year.

Meanwhile, "now it costs \$18 to \$20 an hour to call an emergency mechanic in," he says.

Overtime rates often apply because in many of the newer buildings windows cannot be opened, creating an emergency when there's an air-conditioning breakdown.

Buildings added to the campus from now on will have operable windows which can be opened if the air-conditioning system breaks down.

BUT PROBLEMS in existing buildings in the past have forced faculty to move temporarily to other quarters while the system is fixed.

Walter Steiger, chairman of the physics department, says he and his staff spent three months

in temporary quarters

last spring while repairs were made to the central air-conditioning of the 3-year-old Watanabe Hall.

"The departmental office is in the central part of the building with no windows, and it got unbearably hot when the air conditioning was off," he says.

Steiger is sympathetic to the problems faced by Koehler and his staff.

"They try to do everything they can, but the State is making a terribly poor investment in putting in these new things but not maintaining them," he says.