

I started from the bottom two years ago and have flourished over time. After Kaua‘i Community College, I will pursue my bachelor’s in Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. I decided to go down the Hawaiian Language pathway because ‘ōlelo Hawaii connects me with being kanaka maoli.

For the next semester, I applied for some scholarships. As I answered their questions, one hit me like a brick. It asked about what achievements I had gained associated with Hawaiian culture. My brain thought of things I had gained from learning ‘ōlelo Hawaii, such as the certificates and degrees we all have earned here. *I had no answer.*

For a while, I felt like my six years of ‘ōlelo Hawaii were useless. The question, “*What am I going to do with a Hawaiian Language degree?*” consumed me. I had moments when I regretted my decision to major in Hawaiian and shed tears.

However, a light at the end reassured me. The amazing Kumu Puali‘ili‘imaikalani Rossi and I discussed ‘ōlelo Hawaii one day, stumbling upon the lack of career options in ‘ōlelo Hawaii. Of course, there’s teaching, which is the career pathway I want to go down, but other than that, we don’t see it anywhere else. That was something that fed my thoughts. She said I was not the first to say that about our language.

However, she also said that we, as the next generation, can make it more visible. We can be the first nurses, botanists, chefs, electricians, mechanics, and so on who do their jobs ma ka ‘ōlelo Hawaii. This comforted me, giving me a new perspective on the representation of the Hawaiian language.

How does this relate to the theme “Ua ho‘omakua ka lā‘au?” Although the Hawaiian language might feel useless in a career, we can be the ones to turn this around, help it flourish,

and nourish it to become this tree, this lā'au. It doesn't just apply to the Hawaiian Studies Majors or Native Hawaiian students here but to everyone. In this journey with 'ōlelo Hawaii, we all have a kuleana to encourage others to learn this precious language because the perpetuation of Hawaiian is vital. We can ho'omau or preserve our language worldwide, may it be through the loving communities here in Hawaii or the online communities that are slowly but surely forming. We must be kūpa'a, determined, to the preservation because if we are not, we will lose it – we will lose the lā'au we have planted. Thankfully now, this lā'au is a beautiful and strong tree because of the 'ohana here at Kaua'i Community College. Mahalo nui loa!