

UH TO FOCUS ON AI, EXPAND ONLINE DEGREES

University system working to close curriculum gaps with completely online programs to keep students in Hawaii

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Last year, the University of Hawaii System gained ground in its effort to make higher education a leader in and partner with artificial intelligence – from acquiring AI technology platforms to keep students on a path of success to incentivizing professors to integrate AI in their curriculums and teach AI literacy in their classrooms. In 2026, UH is focusing even more on AI through the introduction of an online AI literacy course and on using technology to increase online programs and courses to make higher education in Hawaii more accessible to Isle residents.

From UH President Wendy Hensel's perspective, higher education is vital to developing the next generation of workers to be critical thinkers and innovators who will not just follow but lead the rapid development of AI in the workforce and in the world – and the plan to do so is now in place.

By fall semester 2026 and spring semester 2027, which start in August and January, respectively, the University of Hawaii expects to complete phase one of its new plan to fill the online course gaps within its current higher education programs.

Through this ongoing initiative, UH will offer many students the opportunity to continue and complete their UH education solely online.

A small number of programs with small gaps will be selected in the coming months for phase one of developing completely online curriculums. For example, some programs are almost fully offered online, save for a few in-person classes, which, under this new plan, will be offered online to fill that program's gap within the next year and a half – creating a fully online program from start to finish.



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The University of Hawaii Windward Community College campus, which serves more than 3,000 students, is one of 10 in the UH system to see online integration.

“We want to target those first because some others may require curriculum revision, it may require some different level of resource or commitment of time. So, trying to deal with the lowest hanging fruit first and then move to the more and more challenging developments as we go,” Kim Siegenthaler, senior advisor to UH President Wendy Hensel, told Pacific Business News in an interview. “This is not something that’s going to be over within a year. It’s a multiyear project to continue assessing market need, market demand, adjusting the programs, looking at what the opportunities are, and also, as we’ve seen more and more, the way learners consume higher education is changing.”

The difference is that many students today are “part-time learners,” Siegenthaler said. “They’re in and out. They need a short-form credential that gets them into the workspace, but then they may need to come back in a few years in order to get that promotion or to make a lateral move.” The plan to provide high-demand programs completely online is part of UH’s larger strategy to integrate the 10 campuses across the Islands and offer students the opportunity to continue their progress toward a degree as they ebb and flow through the workplace and learning in a university. As programs begin to offer a fully online option, the in-person or hybrid options for those programs will remain available, Siegenthaler said. General education classes are already offered completely online at UH, which is helpful for students who may be working full time, have families to take care of or live far away from a physical UH campus. However, with UH’s current programs, which are often hybrid online and

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Wendy Hensel, University of Hawaii president



Kim Siegenthaler, senior advisor to the president



Ina Wanca, University of Hawaii chief academic technology innovation officer