Dear President Lassner and Provost Bruno:

I am writing on behalf of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) regarding the threatened closures of the program in Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai’i Manoa (UHM). As President of ATHE, I speak on behalf of approximately fifteen hundred faculty members, university administrators, adjunct and part-time faculty, and graduate students across the world and I encourage you to seriously reconsider the proposal to “stop-out” the programs in Theatre and Dance. While I acknowledge that the challenges of these times create a need to make hard decisions, moving ahead with these potential closures would be a significant misstep as UHM moves forward into the twenty-first century.

The Theatre program at UHM is renowned globally for its offerings and specialist expertise, particularly in Asian Theatre and Hawaiian Theatre, for both of which it is among the most preeminent providers anywhere in the world. Closing or significantly reducing these programs would have a significant negative impact on the possibilities for studying these subjects and on the world’s knowledge of them going forward, not only for Hawaiians, but far more broadly; it would greatly impact the furtherance of these important modes of academic study.

At a moment when there is global emphasis on the need to engage diverse voices and to explore a range of forms beyond the more conservative western canon, the threat to such notable programs cannot be underestimated. Scholars and practitioners who have studied at UHM in the past have greatly advanced the fields and have ensured that, especially within the US, Asian and indigenous Hawaiian theatre forms have continued to gain prominence and to be present in key discourses of performance traditions, practices and futures.

Theatre and Dance are not simply important topics of study in their own right, but across the curriculum for students pursuing other careers. Regular studies and surveys of business leaders show that the skills and knowledges taught in studying these art forms—collaboration, creativity, clear communication, public speaking, improvisation, emotional intelligence—are valuable across all career paths. In her excellent 2012 book Artistic Literacy, Professor Nancy Kindelan clearly articulates the value of theatre pedagogy to the contemporary learner, writing “A theatre program’s high-impact curricular and pedagogical practices develop Liberal
Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) essential learning outcomes by encouraging cross-departmental connections, improving problem-solving skills through active rather than passive learning, and enriching cultural understanding and civic responsibility through problem-based inquiry—the study of plays and performances” (118). I hope that you will look at and carefully consider such texts as this, or Jill Dolan’s *Geographies of Learning* (2001) or Michelle Hayford and Susan Kattwinkel’s 2018 *Performing Arts as High-Impact Practice*, as you look at the future of teaching Theatre and Dance at the University of Hawai‘i Manoa.

I am happy to discuss this further with you, should you have questions or concerns. I can be reached at president@athe.org.

Sincerest Regards,

Joshua Abrams, PhD
President, Association for Theatre in Higher Education

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CC:
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