

Turtle tagging: Hands-on research for Hawai'i CC Marine Option Program students

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Students from all majors can tailor MOP to their interests.

[Hawai'i Community College](#) students are diving into marine science, by helping count and study 80 endangered green sea turtles along Hawai'i Island's coastlines in the first year of the college's nascent [Marine Option Program](#) (MOP).

"I took a zoology class at Hawai'i CC and in my lab portion we got to go to Punalu'u. We did turtle tagging, which was very inspiring to me because since I was a child I've wanted to do marine science," said Hawai'i CC graduate Eliea Mitchell-Butler. "And to be able to do it and get involved with the local community was very

touching because [the 40-year data set at Punalu'u Black Sand Beach] is the largest and longest-going database worldwide on green sea turtles."

Students worked hands-on in the Hilo Sea Turtle Health and Population Assessment Program through a special research permit with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Under faculty supervision, they hand-captured turtles, assessed their health, measured and weighed them, and applied tags for tracking. Research was conducted at Punalu'u Black Sand Beach and Ha'ena Beach on Hawai'i Island.

"Even though we're the youngest program in the entire system, Hawai'i CC's Marine Option Program is one of the most unique in that we offer research in sea turtles," said MOP program coordinator Jen Sims.

Recent Hawai'i CC graduate Christian Reynolds said, "I never thought I would be part of real conservation science this soon in my undergraduate education. I joined MOP at Hawai'i Community College because it offered me the same opportunities that I would have otherwise had at a four-year university but at a much lower price."

MOP also offers internships, research projects and cultural fieldwork open to all majors.

For more information about the Marine Option Program at Hawai'i CC, email Sims at jlsims@hawaii.edu or visit the [website](#).



Students safely hand-capture green sea turtles, conduct health evaluations, measure and weigh them.



MOP offers students early exposure to marine science through internships, personal research projects.



No other community college in the state incorporates endangered species research so directly.

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