

SUSTAINABILITY NEWSLETTER

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Orlo Steele

For more than 12 years, Hawai'i-CC Forestry Instructor Orlo Steele and his students have been making Hawai'i greener.

Orlo's formal experience in botany began in 1982, when he was an undergraduate at University of California-Santa Barbara, where he double majored in Botany and Environmental Biology. After joining the Peace Corps and doing field work in Central America, he received his Masters and PhD in Botany at University of Hawai'i-Mānoa. Prior to working at Hawai'i-CC, Orlo worked on the island of Mo'orea in French Polynesia for UC-Berkeley as an Ethnobotanist.

Orlo, originally from Honolulu, has been at Hawai'i-CC since January 2007, when he was hired to be a Forestry Instructor and the director of the Forest TEAM Program. The Forestry Program was founded in 2002.

"Its primary purpose is to provide technical education for local students to work with natural resource management, in particular forestry," Orlo said. "The originator of the project, Fred Stone, had worked with biology in Hawai'i for his whole career, and noticed that many [forestry] technicians were coming in and being hired from out of state. They found that there were pathways for local students to become [forestry] technicians."

This year the program has 20 students, and the average class size is seven. Classes include Agroforestry, Field Mapping, GIS Mapping, Pest Management, Forest Ecosystem Management, and students work in the field on a daily basis. 80 percent of graduates from the program go on to work in the field or attain higher degrees.

"If you really love the environment, it's a great career. You will always be taken care of, and there is always work to be done in forestry," said Orlo.

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About a quarter of the property is dedicated to native plant restoration, while the rest is dedicated to forestry and food cultivation. Orlo, a lifelong learner and thinker, experiments with different plants and trees on the farm, seeing what grows well at different elevations.

Orlo’s focus project on his farm is kava or ‘awa, which he enjoys sharing with friends and colleagues. “I like to be able to share [it] so everyone can feel what the old Hawaiian social activity was like,” he said.

In addition to the kava, he grows a mix of hardwood trees including koa, kamani, teak, and mahogany. The fruits grown on the farm include cacao, breadfruit, rambutan, lychee, avocado, and citrus, among others. “The food is to share,” Orlo said with a smile.

If you are interested in learning more about the Forest TEAM program, visit hawaii.hawaii.edu/forestteam or email Orlo at orlo@hawaii.edu.



Orlo with a fruiting hō'awa tree that he planted

