Volcanic eruptions are a fact of life on the Big Island. It is no surprise that UH Hilo is home to a top-notch Geology Department, supporting the community during eruptions, attracting students from around the world, and launching students into a variety of careers. Geologists study the earth, interpreting events in the natural world to better understand the forces that shape it and the hazards that result from it. Active volcanoes a short drive from the Hilo campus are a big draw for students and faculty interested in geology.

In addition to regular coursework, geology students at UH Hilo are trained in field and laboratory techniques. Students also can work closely with their professors on projects that focus on local processes. For example, during the recent eruptions of Kilauea and Mauna Loa, fresh lava samples were collected in the field and students and professors analyzed them. Geologists also have monitored the ongoing deformation of Kilauea Volcano and mapping the island’s siren cones. In 1998, the late Senator Daniel Inouye set up a cooperative agreement linking UH Hilo, the Center for the Study of Active Volcanoes, and the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory (HVO). This arrangement provides support for geology students and alumni to work on outreach projects or on scientific teams.

Students enrolling in the UH Hilo geology program are motivated by curiosity and a desire to understand how the earth works. They work hard and are rewarded with good critical thinking skills. We are proud of our students, who work at a variety of jobs, including monitoring and studying volcanoes, environmental consulting, computerized mapping, and science education. Quite a few of our graduates go on to graduate school and others find jobs locally or on the US mainland. Notably, the Deputy Scientist-in-Charge at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory is a UH Hilo geology alumnus who continued his studies in geology and is now back in Hawai’i.

Geology major and aspiring science journalist Lachen Forster contributed to this article. Lachen grew up on the Big Island and eventually discovered her love of science and writing. She has enjoyed talking and writing about the science of volcanoes.

By Dr. Jene Michaud, Professor and Chair, Geology Department

The University of Hawai‘i at Hilo Marine Option Program (MOP) has just celebrated its 30th year of providing a wide variety of applied learning and experiential marine education opportunities for college students across the state and around the Pacific. MOP students can get involved in field trips and field courses, learn to speak fluent “MOPportunity” events, meet guest speakers and networking opportunities, and gain practical experience in diverse research, aquaculture, water safety, boating, animal response, and other skills that make them in demand for marine research and conservation jobs. Marine-oriented agencies and organizations across the state and around the Pacific are populated with MOP graduates. Students of any major may earn the MOP academic Subject Certificate in addition to their primary degree for taking several marine-oriented courses and completing an independent marine research project. Many students receive scholarships from local businesses and organizations in support of their marine research ambitions.

Students employed by the Cooperative Agreement work side-by-side with UH Hilo faculty and students to monitor the ongoing deformation of Kilauea Volcano and mapping the island’s siren cones. The Cooperative Agreement also supports outreach projects involving resilience and emergency management training in schools and community organizations.

Students interested in geology.

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