

Kawena Elkington

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Geography and Hawaiian Studies scholar specializing in Hawaiian ancestral circular economy, ahupua‘a restoration, and water governance, with a focus on how indigenous knowledge systems can inform contemporary approaches to land, water, and community stewardship. Strong record of community engagement, publications, and international presentations.

EDUCATION

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa)

Expected December 2026

Doctorate of Philosophy, Geography and Environment

Dissertation Title: Reviving the Hawaiian Ancestral Circular Economy Through Ahupua‘a Restoration in He‘eia

Cumulative GPA: 3.95

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

May 2019

Masters of Arts, Hawaiian Studies

Thesis Title: O Kualoa, O Na Kanawai No Ia O Ko Mau Kupuna: Reviving Buried Ideas of ‘Aina Through Mo‘olelo

Mo‘oku‘auhau, and Aloha ‘Aina

Cumulative GPA: 4.0

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

May 2015

Bachelor of Arts, Hawaiian Resource Management

Cumulative GPA: 3.62

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Hawai‘inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge

UH Mānoa

Graduate Research Assistant

August 2019 - Present

Lead research initiatives on Hawaiian resource management, circular economy, and water management, resulting in two peer-reviewed journal articles and three book chapters through collaborations with community leaders and international scholars. Presented cutting-edge research at seven conferences, including six international venues, establishing recognition as an emerging expert in indigenous sustainability. Presented as an invited speaker for six panel discussions, showcasing expertise on Hawaiian resource management and circular economy applications. Coordinated one-day conference annually, bringing together scholars, community members, students, and stakeholders to advance discourse on Hawaiian sustainability and circular economy principles. Co-led writing and lobbying for the passage of SCR56 HD,1 requesting the Governor to establish a Hawaii Circular Economy Task Force to transition Hawaii to a circular economy by 2035.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

School of Architecture; Becoming ‘Āina: Hawai‘i Summer Program

Yale University

Program Coordinator & Community Liaison

January 2026 – Present

Serve as a liaison between the Becoming ‘Āina: Hawai‘i summer program and local Native Hawaiian practitioners, cultural organizations, and community-based initiatives. Ensure program operations align with cultural protocols and reciprocal community relationships. Support curriculum development for the three-week field program based on ahupua‘a recovery through environmental and cultural restoration. Support coordination of on-site logistics, scheduling, and resources for ten graduate students during the program’s in-residence phase in Hawai‘i. Facilitate workshops, field trips, and community-based instruction connecting students directly with practitioners and place-based learning. Advise program director on culturally appropriate engagement, permissions, and protocols for working with community partners.

Hawaiian Studies Department; Department of Geography and Environment; Social Sciences **UH Mānoa**
Instructor **Spring 2019 – Present**

Design and deliver engaging lecture courses to classes ranging from 21 to more than 140 students. Create dynamic learning environments that blend traditional lectures with peer discussions, mixed media resources, and experiential learning opportunities. Incorporate culturally responsive teaching methods that connect Hawaiian geography, resource management, and environmental concepts to students' lived experiences. Develop and implement service-learning opportunities, allowing students to engage directly with community restoration projects. Supervise teaching assistants for large enrollment courses, providing mentorship and professional development opportunities.

FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

Hawaii Pacific Foundation Doctoral Research Award **July 2025**
Recognizes outstanding doctoral students conducting high quality research that advances commitment or contribution to the study of issues important to the Native Hawaiian community.

(Inaugural) Toufiq Siddiqi Climate Change Fellow **April 2025**
Selected by GEE-21 to attend, participate in, and bring messages back from the Conference of the Parties (COP) 30 in Belem, Brazil. GEE-21 empowers students to engage in climate advocacy by equipping them with the skills to influence their governments, driving progress in addressing the climate crisis.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

Department of Art and Art History **UH Mānoa**
Committee Member, Senior Honors Project **May 2026**
Served on the senior honors committee for an undergraduate student whose project developed from a paper originally written for GEO 368. Provided disciplinary feedback from a Geography and Hawaiian Studies perspective on the student's research and writing.

Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies **UH Mānoa**
University Pipeline Development **August 2021 – Present**
Selected to teach HWST 207 (Hawaiian Perspectives on Resource Management) to high school seniors as part of strategic initiative bridging secondary and higher education. Adapted university-level Hawaiian Studies curriculum to engage college-bound students. Provided early exposure to university-level coursework, facilitating students' transition from high school to higher education. Serve as recurring volunteer judge with partner secondary institution for senior internship presentations, providing comprehensive evaluation to graduating students. This entails assessment of students' professional growth through analysis of presentation content and public speaking abilities. Delivered detailed, constructive feedback to support students' development.

O'ahu Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
UH Mānoa Student Representative **March 2022 – November 2022**
Represented student perspectives in regional economic planning across innovation, education, and circular economy sectors. Contributed to strategic vision for O'ahu's economic future, ensuring inclusion of emerging workforce priorities. Advocated for integration of sustainability principles and indigenous knowledge systems in economic development frameworks. Facilitated communication between economic development stakeholders and university student population

BOOK CHAPTERS

Elkington, K., Wright, M. K., and Lewis, A. (accepted for publication; expected Spring 2027). Chapter 10, He Wai Puna: Indigenous Hydrology and Settler Colonial Disruption of Freshwater Springs in Hawai'i. In *From Settler Colonialism to Green Colonialism: A Comparative Look at the United States and the Nordic Countries*. University of Arizona Press.

Beamer, K., Souza, P., & **Elkington, K.** (2025). Wai Governance and the Ancestral Circular Economy. In K. Beamer (Ed.), *Waiwai: Water and the future of Hawaii* (pp. 44-60). University of Hawaii Press.

Elkington, K., Souza, P., Lowe, I. & Beamer, K. (2025). Law and Water Management in the Hawaiian Kingdom. In K. Beamer (Ed.), *Waiwai: Water and the future of Hawaii* (pp. 44-60). University of Hawaii Press.

Beamer, K., **Elkington, K.** & Souza, P. (2025). Hierarchy of Water Management in Hawai‘i. In K. Beamer (Ed.), *Waiwai: Water and the future of Hawaii* (pp. 44-60). University of Hawaii Press.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Souza, P., **Elkington, K.**, & Beamer, K. (2026). Wai governance and the Hawaiian ancestral circular economy. *Water International*, 1-21. (Editor’s Choice)

Elkington, K. (2023). ‘A‘ole Pau Ka ‘Ike I Ka Hālau Ho‘okahi (Knowledge Is Not Restricted To One School Of Thought): Reflecting on the Significance of Indigenous Knowledge in Geography. *Society and Space*.
<https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/a-ole-pau-ka-ike-i-ka-halau-ho-okahi-knowledge-is-not-restricted-to-one-school-of-thought-reflecting-on-the-significance-of-indigenous-knowledge-in-geography>.

Beamer, K., **K. Elkington**, P. Souza, A. Tuma, A. Thorenz, S. Köhler, K. Kukea-Shultz, K. Kotubetey, and K. B. Winter. (2023). Island and Indigenous systems of circularity: how Hawai‘i can inform the development of universal circular economy policy goals. *Ecology and Society* 28(1):9.

Beamer, K., Tuma, A., Thorenz, A., Boldoczki, S., Kotubetey, K., Kukea-Shultz, K., **Elkington, K.** (2021). Reflections on Sustainability Concepts: Aloha ‘Āina and the Circular Economy. *Sustainability* 13, no. 5, 2984.

DiVito, N. J., Dye, T. S., **Elkington, K.**, Gunness, J., Hellebrand, E., Jourdane, E., ... & Sinton, J. M. (2020). Volcanic glass at Kualoa, O ‘ahu, Hawaiian Islands: Paired technological and geochemical sourcing analyses of an expedient tool industry. *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports*, 30, 102117.

SELECTED INVITED TALKS

Case, S., **Elkington, K.**, Kealoha, D., Miles, A., & Syrmos, V. (moderator) (2024, November 8) *Growing Indigenous Innovation Partnerships and Initiatives* [Plenary panel]. A Catalyst for Change: Indigenous Innovation at UH - A UH Innovation Conference. Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu, HI.

Elkington, K., Flores, P., Makua, K., Price, D. (moderator), & Woodside, U. (2024, September 19) *Environmental Justice Panel Series – ‘Ike Kūpuna: Connecting Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Circular Economies, and Revitalized Food Systems* [Conference panel discussion]. Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement Native Hawaiian Convention, Kailua-Kona, HI.

Elkington, K., Iwan, L., & Kenley, K. (2023, June 24) *Local Business and Ethnic Development* [Conference panel - virtual]. Islands of Good Governance: Indigenous Knowledge and Community Development in the Contemporary Pacific Youth Forum, Office of Fellowships for Austronesian Studies, National Chenchi University, Taiwan.

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Beamer, K. & **Elkington, K.** (2025, July). *Indigenous Water Management Systems as Models for Climate-Resilient Island Sustainability* [Conference presentation]. 12th International Conference on Industrial Ecology. National University of Singapore, Singapore.

Elkington, K. (2024, September) *Law and Water Management in the Hawaiian Kingdom* [Conference presentation]. International Water Resources Association’s Islands Water Congress. Nordic House, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands.

Elkington, K. & Souza, P. (2024, July). *Elevating Local And Global Sustainability Partnerships For A Resilient Future: The Poai Ke Aloha Aina Project* [Conference presentation]. 24th International Conference on Knowledge, Culture, and Change in Organizations, Luisada University, Lisbon, Portugal.

Elkington, K. & Souza, P. (2023, October). *Ancestral Circular Economy In Hawaii: Aloha Aina As A Framework For Reciprocal Care* [Conference presentation]. The Second International Conference on Small Island States and Subnational Island Jurisdictions. University of Aruba, Oranjestad, Aruba.

RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Native Hawaiian Science & Engineering Mentorship Program (NHSEMP)

UH Mānoa

Graduate Research Assistant

December 2017 – August 2019

Established the program's now ongoing 'O'i Ka Na'auao Workshop Series – Integrating STEM & Culture', designing innovative learning experiences for undergraduate students. Developed curriculum and activities that reframed ancestral Hawaiian practices through an engineering and scientific lens, empowering students to recognize their cultural knowledge as foundational to modern STEM disciplines. Coordinated undergraduate student participation in outreach programs including Na Pua Noeau STEM Summer Series and Science Olympiad for middle and high school students, creating a pipeline of mentorship. Mentored undergraduate students in professional development, including conference presentation skills, resume writing, interview preparation, and protocols for applying to STEM careers. Organized and supervised high-impact community service projects that strengthened connections between STEM education and Hawaiian cultural perspectives. Facilitated off-campus site visits and field trips that broadened students' exposure to STEM career possibilities.

Community Engagement Manager, Kupu, HI

June 2020 – June 2021

Developed and executed strategic fundraising and marketing initiatives, significantly enhancing organizational visibility and community support. Managed donor and alumni relations programs that strengthened long-term stakeholder engagement. Created and implemented targeted outreach activities that expanded community partnerships. Supervised large-scale community events that advanced the organization's conservation mission

Outreach Coordinator, Hawai'i Conservation Alliance

January 2014 – August 2017

Coordinated the Work Exchange/Volunteer program for the Hawai'i Conservation Conference for three years, managing hundreds of participants. Designed and implemented comprehensive communications and marketing strategies that increased stakeholder engagement. Supported community-based conservation initiatives through educational programming, workshops, and digital platforms. Collaborated with diverse conservation stakeholders to advance HCA's mission of protecting Hawai'i's native ecosystems

Volunteer Program Manager, Pacific Rim Concepts

January 2016 – September 2016

Led the recruitment, training, and management of 1,000 volunteers for the IUCN World Conservation Congress, ensuring seamless operations for an international event with 11,000 delegates. Developed comprehensive volunteer protocols, scheduling systems, and communication channels that maximized efficiency across multiple congress venues. Coordinated with international stakeholders to strategically place volunteers where their skills would most benefit congress activities. Maintained exceptional volunteer retention rates through effective recognition programs and relationship management. Delivered support services that significantly contributed to the success of this landmark environmental congress

Field Technician & Education Guide, Kualoa Ranch

May 2011 – June 2015

Implemented conservation initiatives including invasive species removal, native plant restoration, and management of cultural sites. Conducted educational tours and supervised service projects focusing on sustainability, Hawaiian culture and history, and natural resource management. Facilitated connections between visitors and Hawaiian cultural and environmental perspectives, enhancing awareness of conservation issues