

Formative Assessment: The Rise and Fall of Undergraduate Ethnobotany Programs in the United States



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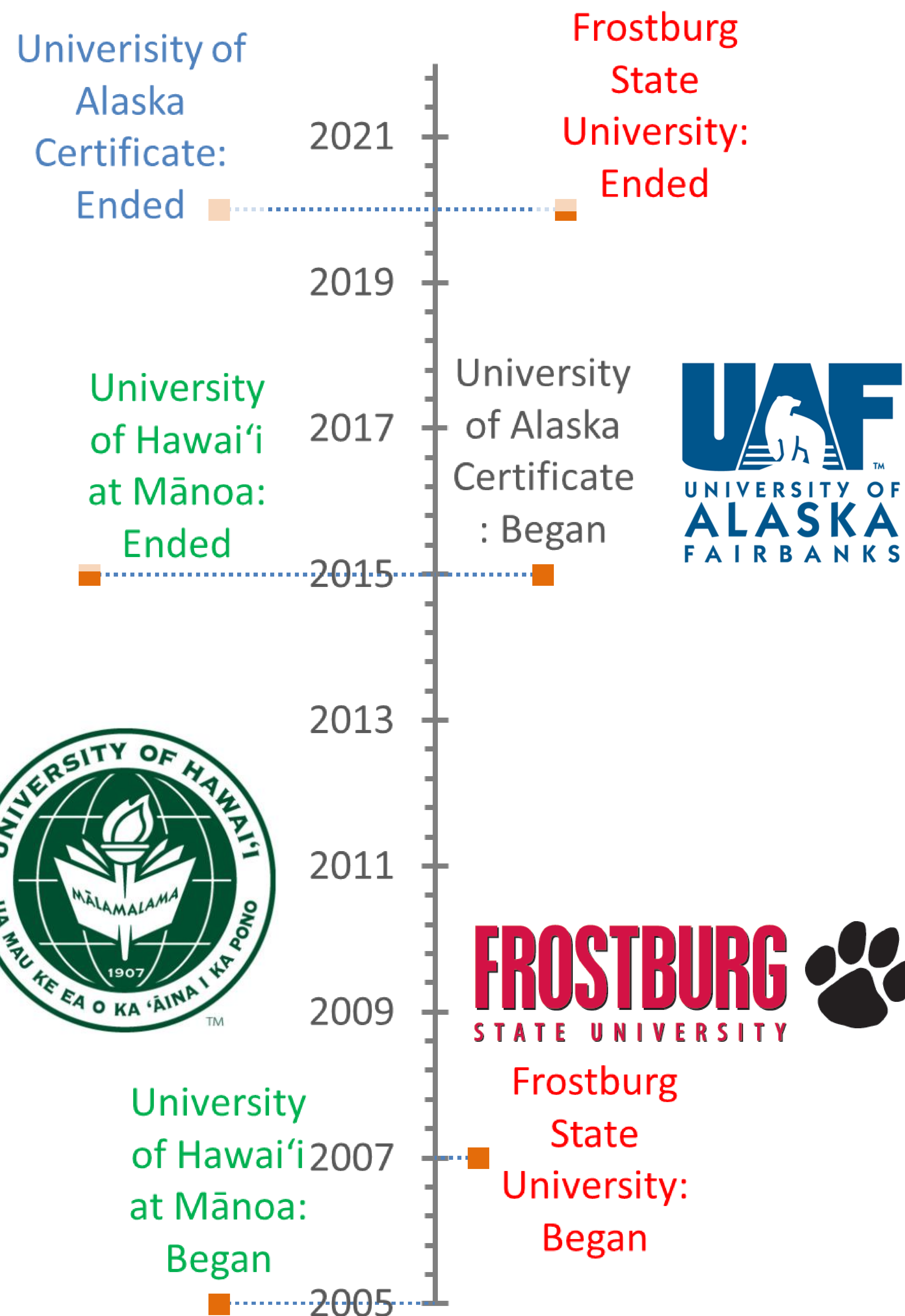
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Abstract

Despite extensive quality training of graduate students, undergraduate degree programs in ethnobotany have been limited in the United States. The first Bachelors of Science degree in Ethnobotany was offered in by the University of Hawaii's College of Natural Sciences' Department of Botany in 2005 and ended in 2015. The University of Hawaii had hosted SEB's Annual Meeting in 1992 and 2001. In 2007, Frostburg State University in Maryland began the second BS degree in Ethnobotany within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences' Biology Department. This program discontinued in 2020. SEB's Annual Meeting was hosted in Frostburg during the height of student enrollment in 2012. Several factors resulted in the discontinuation of the program including the requirement to take summer and January classes, course frequencies of every other year, and only one faculty member teaching all the required rigorous courses. Over the course of Frostburg's *thirteen-year program* and Hawaii's *ten-year program*, many undergraduate students were heavily involved the Society for Economic Botany and attended annual meetings. How can the Society attract undergraduates without these core constituents? The University of Alaska, Fairbanks now has a new online Occupational Endorsement Certificate in Ethnobotany, requiring eight courses. This program replaces the previous in-person Undergraduate Ethnobotany Certificate which began in 2015 and discontinued in 2020 which was 100% grant-funded. The relatively short life-spans of these programs is due to a variety of factors that will be discussed include the overreliance on one individual to champion the programs and a lack of clear career options.

Programmatic Timeline



Programmatic Highlights

Collaboration with the Society for Economic Botany

- The University of Hawaii hosted in 1992 and 2001.
- Frostburg State University in Maryland hosted in 2012.

Focus of The Society on quality teaching

- Open Science Network in Ethnobiology (Patricia D. Harrison, Gail E. Wagner, Rainer Bussmann, Sunshine L. Brosi, Will C. McClatchey, 2009-2014, National Science Foundation, Research Coordination Network-Undergraduate Biology Education (RCN-UBE), #0840946)
- Teaching Tuesdays at Society Meetings beginning in 2008 at Duke University



Programmatic Challenges

Unclear Career Goals

- What careers are we training our students for at the Undergraduate Level? Is a bachelor's degree the appropriate level of training? Or Masters or Certificate?

Financial and Personnel Challenges

- Programs relying on external funding, limited enrollment numbers are non-sustainable
- Overreliance on single individual faculty members or champions of programs

<https://thebottomlinenews.com/fsu-ethnobotany-program-to-be-discontinued/>

<https://portal.nifa.usda.gov/web/crisprojectpages/1013953-drumbeats-alaska.html>

<https://www.alaska.edu/research/review/uafdocs/Discontinue%20-%20UC%20Ethnobotany%20-%20UAF%204.10.20.pdf>

<https://uaf.edu/academics/programs/occupational-endorsements/ethnobotany.php>

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