March 26, 2026

TO: RYAN PERROY, CHAIR OF TCBES

FROM: SERI LUANGPHINITH, ALO

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF TCBES SELF-STUDY

CC: ANDREW OLIPHANT, SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY (EXTERNAL REVIEWER)
SIMON KATTENHORN, DEAN OF CNHS
KEIKI KAWAIʻAEʻA, INTERIM VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Per UH Hilo's program review guidelines, the ALO evaluates "the self-study for compliance with WSCUC standards of accreditation, namely that programs are undertaking regular (yearly) assessment of both core competencies and programmatic learning objectives. The ALO should review past self studies and compare them against the most recent program review for progress. In particular, attention is needed to ensure SLOs, PLOs, curriculum matrices, and other elements of ideal practice in assessment are acted upon and that the data is used to 'close the loop' in terms of improving student learning" (pp. 4-5).

It should be noted that previous WSCUC campus reviews mainly focused on undergraduate core competency assessment given mandated focus on universal skills per CFR 2.2a in the 2013 Standards. It was only during the recent 2022 site visit that a shift away from the core competencies was communicated and a brief comment was made about graduate level student learning: "UH Hilo also assesses core competencies for its graduate students. This is interesting but not required by WSCUC. Since UH Hilo has a history of struggling with assessment of student learning, the team encourages the institution to direct its time and energy at the graduate level to assessing the achievement of program learning outcomes, which *is* a WSCUC requirement. (CFRs 2.4, 2.7, 4.1)" (Report of the WSCUC Visiting Team, 2022)

TCBES's review falls between the 2013 Standards and the 2023 Standards and thus their self-study reflects a beginning beginning shift towards PLO-based assessment, not an established focus.

This being said, what follows below is my assessment of TCBES's self-study based on my charge as ALO.

Core Competency Assessment

As stated in the self study, TCBES has been participating with the Graduate Council to ensure all programs at the post-baccalaureate level are rigorous for that level (p. 25). The program's participation is outstanding as they capture a large portion of their student body (*n*s versus total number of students).

Core Competency: Information Literacy (4 pt scale) (Graduate Students: 64) Fall 2019: CBES 601		Documentation Conventions	Appropriateness of Sources	Evaluating Sources (Critical Thinking)	Integrating Sources (Critical Thinking)
AY 2019-2020 (*n* = 17)	AVG	3.60	3.50	2.30	2.50

Core Competency: Quantitative Reasoning Programmatic Assessment PLO 4 (4 pt scale)	Analytic Inquiry	Quantitative Fluency	Visual Representation
AY 2019-2022 (Graduate Students: 64) (*n* = 20) AVG	2.00	2.20	2.00
AY 2022-2023 (Graduate Students: 55) (*n* = 19) AVG	1.95	1.89	2.06

Core Competency: Written Communication (4 pt scale) (Graduate Students: 54) Fall 2023		Line of Reasoning (Critical Thinking)	Organization and Structure	Content	Language Prose Syntax
AY 2023-2022 (*n* = 20)	AVG	2.68	2.63	2.38	2.78

Core Competency: Oral Communication (4 pt scale) (Graduate Students: 55) Spring 2025: CBES 601		Organization and Structure	Content	Language	Delivery
AY 2024-2025 (*n* = 23)	AVG	3.00	2.90	3.00	2.40

The program should also be commended for truthfully documenting less-than-ideal results (pp. 26-32), which arguably may be reflective of the natural difficulties students encounter as they move from undergraduate performance to higher standards at the graduate level. For this reason, I recommend that going forward the program needs to spend more time thinking about how to improve on this data, because what is missing from the section on student learning outcomes assessment is the "closing of the loop"--in other words, actions that the program can take to improve student performance. The program may want to consider scaffolding assignments, multiple submissions of work (i.e. multiple drafts before final submission), peer tutoring, even AI tools to help students attain graduate competency. Documenting concrete steps and then reassessing skills to see if these interventions work is the hallmark of meaningful assessment.

Similarly, the program is to be additionally commended for quickly developing the post graduation survey that is linked to PLO 3 in the spring of 2026 (pp. 23-25). The survey captures feedback from 26 former students (or a 33% response rate) and shows students overwhelmingly self-reporting that the skills learned in the program are used in their professions. Because many of the skills reported are core competencies, the recommendation is to continue assessing quantitative reasoning, oral communication, etc., but reported in the context of programmatic learning outcomes assessment. Additionally, part of PLO 1 should also be embedded in this survey:

> PLO 1: Graduates of the TCBES program should be able to perform, interpret, and communicate scientific research in the interdisciplinary field of conservation biology and environmental science.

While the ALO has recently created versions of UH Hilo's graduate core competency rubrics that are tagged to TCBES PLOs for use in future programmatic assessment, the language underlined in PLO 1 cannot readily be assessed with these existing measurements (see attached). Given the nature of the statement, the ALO recommends adding a question or two on the new survey to solicit qualitative feedback on the quality of students' "learning to perform scientific research" as an alternative. Some possibilities:

- TCBES's goal is for students to learn how to undertake scientific research in conservation biology and environmental science. How well did TCBES prepare you to perform scientific research? Can you be specific about how the program trained you to do this at the graduate level?
- How confident are you in your abilities to engage in scientific research on your own going forward, and what are your plans for research in the future? Do you see scientific research as part of your future plans?

Overall, TCBES has developed a sound foundation for sustainable student learning outcomes assessment and the ALO looks forward to their continued progress. The next review will be scheduled for AY 2031-2032.