

May 23, 2022

WASC Senior College and University Commission
1001 Marina Village Parkway
Suite 402
Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, we would first like to thank our WSCUC liaison and the site team who visited us on April 6-8, 2022:

- Mark Goor, WSCUC Liaison
- Judy Sasaki, Chair
- Harold Stanislaw, Assistant Chair
- Gloria Niles, Member
- Tricia O'Reilly, Member
- Joseph Slowensky, Member

We received their comprehensive report and are grateful for the careful and in-depth analysis offered by the team. We welcome the opportunity to reflect on our strengths and to begin planning for addressing weaknesses as highlighted by the site team's report.

UH Hilo's Response to COVID

The COVID-related delay in the visit (originally scheduled for October 2021) created a longer than usual time between institutional report and site visit, which presented both an opportunity and some disconnects.

The delay presented the opportunity to launch the institutional strategic plan, the result of 3 years of conversation and planning. During the creation of that plan, 143 faculty participated in listening sessions, 116 faculty participating in answering the "Question of the month," and 28 participated in the strategic planning summit. Still, it is obvious from the Faculty Congress strategic vision document that some faculty still did not feel that the plan represented their views. Another campus-wide plan is just nearing completion now, the Hawai'i Papa O Ke Ao (HPOKA) campus plan. HPOKA is a "presidential appointed work committee tasked with developing, implementing and assessing strategic actions to make the University of Hawai'i a leader in indigenous education." The Hilo campus now has an opportunity to weave together all three of these plans (not just the two mentioned in Recommendation 2 from the WSCUC team). Significantly, the UH system is also engaging in a strategic planning process currently, and we will have additional opportunities to engage a campus and systemwide vision for the future in the coming months.

The greatest disconnect with the delay in the visit was the fact that our institutional report did not contain much reflection on COVID, due to the fact that most of it was written before January 2021. At that time, we were still in crisis management mode across the University of Hawai'i system and had not had time to truly reflect on the long-term impact of COVID. We also made a conscious decision not to use COVID as an excuse for a lack of progress on a variety of issues before us. There is no doubt, however, that COVID had its effects on the UH Hilo campus.

For example, the newly re-established long-range budget planning committee (LRBPC) had to concentrate on budget cutting strategies instead of their true charge, which is to make more proactive strategic decisions (Recommendation 7). Bringing back the LRBPC was planned pre-pandemic to increase transparency around budget (Recommendation 8); by necessity it turned into a body to consult on potential budget cuts. What the pandemic has given us is an opportunity to reflect upon both economic and academic sustainability.

Another major impact of the pandemic, of course, was the transition to online learning. Because we live in an island state, we were far more conservative in coming back out of an exclusively online environment. Health care resources are constrained on our island, and thus we were very cautious about how and when to re-engage students in face-to-face learning. We have been surveying our students, first on the quality of their learning in the online environment and second on what mix of online, hybrid, and in-person offering might best suit them in the future. On the latter point, we see that many of our students prefer having some online options, but we also note that academic performance in some cases has suffered in the online environment. We are continuing to gather data so that faculty and deans can make appropriate decisions as to modality in the future.

Assessment and Program Review

At this time, we can offer the following update to issues related to Program Review (pp. 13-16). UH Hilo has actually been in the process of getting programs up to date in the calendar for Program Review. Four self-studies--Anthropology, History, Geography, and Political Science)--were turned in shortly after the site team visit and external reviews for all four are now ongoing with reports due in July by reviewers from the University of Waikato (NZ), California State University-Bernardino, Humboldt State University, and California State University-Chico respectively. The external review for the College of Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (CAFNRM) is concluding interviews with faculty and students and the reviewer, from the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, will be submitting her report by August. Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke"elikelani (College of Hawaiian Language) has received its external report from University of London (UK) and we will be posting that shortly. Liberal Studies has also completed its self-study but as an irregular degree which only intermittently accepts a handful of students who wish to design degrees that are interdisciplinary, this was not slated for external review. Thus we can state that the majority of our degree programs are on track with the new schedule as cited by the team.

Regarding issues related to Graduate Assessment (pp. 24-25), UH Hilo is proud of its commitment to graduate assessment which is based on concepts outlined in Lumina's Degree Qualifications Profile which stipulates the need for increasing levels of core skills basic to all degrees.

But we do acknowledge that more work needs to be done assessing program-specific outcomes and the site team's request for PLOs, matrices, and program-specific assessment tools provided us with the impetus needed to encourage programs to develop the means necessary to undertake this work. All of these materials are posted for each program on our program review webpage and will serve as a starting point for programs coming up for review starting next academic year.

Finally, regarding issues related to Program Assessment (pp. 13, 21-22, 28), we will also be encouraging programs to develop qualitative assessments as well. Programs have access to a data dashboard that annually reports numbers of majors, numbers of Pell grant recipients and Native Hawaiian students in the major; qualitative assessments such as surveys can be designed to help programs gather information on student satisfaction with the degree but also help identify scenarios that pose problems for retention (i.e. housing or difficulty with GE courses). A pilot of an instrument that can also be used to compare data across programs will be piloted in the Fall in Chemistry and English which are both coming up for program review within the next two years.

Fiscal Sustainability

One of the items in the campus Action Plan (the implementation companion to our strategic plan) calls for us to "Identify and expand alternative revenue sources and sustain and grow existing sources." Since the site visit, we have learned that the state legislature has restored the budget that was cut in 2021. We can now work with our LRBPC on strategic spending from the reserve to forward our strategic plan. In addition, the UH Foundation has just recently restored the position for a development officer for Hawaii Island. That person is engaging with the campus units to discuss fund-raising priorities that will also align with the strategic direction of the campus and allow us to build upon our place- and community based educational offerings (Team Commendations 3 & 4).

With respect to Recommendations 7 & 8, the Academic Affairs budgeting processes have three major changes completed or in process intended to create a more forward-looking and transparent budgeting process. In 2020, the department chairs and VCAA completed a long-requested project to establish formulas for department chair compensations for the academic year and for summer. Following on that plan and the framework for future planning constructed by the LRBPC as a part of their prioritization work during the threats of budget cuts, Academic Affairs established an initial rubric for hiring faculty and staff with the intention of creating a long-term, flexible set of hiring priorities. The elements of the rubric include both qualitative and quantitative measures. The former include "Aina Connections" and "Uniqueness," which often speak to some of the smaller programs such as Geology, Astronomy, and Heritage

Management, which might otherwise be overlooked with a wholly quantitative rubric. Of the latter measures, student-faculty ratio, number of majors, and student semester hours generated are included; these measures attempt to capture both outright size, but also the service to other units. Many of these matters are also in program review, so the foregoing hires will have to be closely tied to elements made evident in the self-reflections in program reviews. The deans and directors were asked to share the measures with the divisions and departments within their colleges, and an initial priority list has been created from those discussions and will be shared at the start of the new academic year. Finally, over the summer, a new budget model for discretionary funding will be provided to academic affairs units; the formulas that underpin the budget, as well as the distribution itself and any attendant memos, will be posted on a new Academic Affairs budget website. The VCAA will be meeting with the college fiscal staff to determine workability of any new budgetary structures.

Another key component of the economic sustainability of UH Hilo is an enrollment management plan (Team Recommendation 5). The Student Success Leadership Team is actively working on this plan and bringing on board a new admissions director will help move the process forward. We are currently in negotiations with the finalist for the position. While the site team was on campus, we emphasized the retention strategies over the admissions strategies. Admissions has brought in record-setting freshman classes in recent years, but our retention rates have not markedly improved, and our transfer rates have suffered as the enrollment in the UH community colleges has decreased rather dramatically, especially at our main feeder college, Hawaii Community College. We have begun a leaver and stayer study of our transfer population that will guide that part of enrollment management. We also will be bringing forth more data to engage the campus around the retention issue.

A Culture of Data-Informed Decision Making

One of the bright spots in the restoration of our campus budget is that we are actively recruiting a director of institutional research, a search that was temporarily suspended due to an earlier threat that the legislature was going to sweep positions. Like the search for the new admissions director, this one is in its final stages. While we work to expand our data capacity (Team Recommendation 4) through this new hire, we have pursued other pathways to create a more data-informed culture. We received a grant from the Stupski Foundation to contract with the California State University (CSU) system to build faculty dashboards for UH Hilo. Thirteen members of our campus community, a cross-divisional team, successfully completed the CSU Student Success Analytics course, and we are currently recruiting a second cohort. Another team (which shares some membership with the former) is engaged in the Transformation Accelerator Cohort through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). UH Hilo is one of only fifteen institutions engaged in this project, which focuses on equity and student success. Through that project, our campus has access to the Postsecondary Data Partnership hosted by the National Student Clearinghouse. As the Hilo Team becomes more familiar with this resource, we will build on our nascent data culture, especially among the faculty. As the site visit team rightly noticed, better and more accessible data will help the campus better address enrollment, budget, and academic quality.

Policy, Process, and Administrative Stability

With a new chancellor appointed in 2019 and a new vice chancellor for academic affairs in 2020, UH Hilo has begun to stabilize the senior administration. A search for a permanent vice chancellor for administration is currently underway. The new leadership has a demonstrated commitment to assessment and with their arrival, the program review reports are reviewed and responded to in a more comprehensive way than just a thumbs-up, thumbs-down regarding requests for additional resources. The institution is putting in place more student centered and equitable policies and procedures around academic actions and financial aid. We have added additional transparency around budget and we are in the process of establishing a cross-divisional policy team that can track system and campus policies and make sure we are current in both our policies and processes. Not only is this development needed by the campus, but these efforts will create a hedge against administrative turnover. With stronger, more consistent policies and procedures in place, the campus will be able to sustain its operations more smoothly when administrations change over time.

Communication and Shared Governance

The COVID pandemic has certainly increased the amount of communication between administrative offices and the campus at large. In addition to the long-standing chancellor's blog and *Ha'ilono* campus newsletter, there are emails to the campus with COVID related updates, and monthly Zoom forums that are open to anyone in the campus community who is interested. The campus has also instituted a monthly student town hall via Zoom, a parent's newsletter, and a monthly newsletter from the Dean of Students. As we transition to more in-person meetings and classes, the campus will maintain periodic Zoom sessions in an effort to reach those who might be teleworking or who might not be able to leave their desk for a face-to-face meeting.

Step by step through the strategic planning process there were open calls for feedback on drafts, and when a request was made for an anonymous feedback mechanism, that was created (Recommendation 2). There was also an open call for input on budget issues when the state cut the university's budget in 2021 (Recommendation 8). Many on campus have remarked that this is the most open administration in their memory. However, there is still a vocal contingent that believes that communication could be improved, and we will continue to provide meaningful opportunities for dialogue and the creation of a shared vision for the future of our campus (Recommendations 1 and 2).

Respectfully submitted by:

Bonnie Irwin, Chancellor
Kris Roney, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs
Seri Luangphinith, Accreditation Liaison Officer