

**REPORT OF THE WSCUC TEAM
SPECIAL VISIT**

To the University of Hawaii at Hilo

April 10-12, 2024

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The team evaluated the institution under the 2013 Handbook and Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WSCUC website.

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SECTION I – OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

A. Description of Institution, Accreditation History, as relevant, and Visit

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) is a comprehensive regional institution that grew out of an extension campus founded on Hawai'i Island in 1947 by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH Mānoa). The campus began as a two-year institution with the first four-year degrees awarded in 1971. UH Hilo initially shared facilities and administrative functions with the local Hilo Technical School, a vocation-focused institution that eventually transitioned into Hawai'i Community College. The two institutions still share some facilities, and both are members of the University of Hawai'i system, which includes six other community colleges, the University of Hawai'i-West O'ahu, and UH Mānoa. The UH system is overseen by the Hawai'i state legislature and the University of Hawai'i board of regents. David Lassner is the president of the UH system and leads UH Mānoa.

UH Hilo is comprised of six colleges: the College of Arts and Sciences; the College of Natural and Health Sciences; the College of Business and Economics; the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Natural Resource Management; Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language; and the Daniel K. Inouye College of Pharmacy. The fall 2023 headcount was 2,781, with 66% of students enrolled full-time. Undergraduates account for 81% of the student body and can choose from 39 majors along with a variety of minors and certificate programs. Students pursuing a master's degree (6% of total headcount) can select from six different programs, while four programs are offered for doctoral students (7% of headcount). The remaining 6% of the total headcount represent non-degree-seeking students. Since the last Accreditation Visit, UH Hilo has stopped out a BA in Gender and Women's Studies and subsumed an MA in Hawaiian Language and Literature as a track within the existing MA in

Indigenous Language and Culture Education. Two new programs since the last affirmation visit are a BS in Data Sciences and a BA in Education Studies, with both starting in fall of 2024.

The majority of UH Hilo students (49%) are residents of Hawai'i Island. The remaining students are largely divided between residency on other Hawaiian islands (20%) and other states and territories (25%). International students and students with no stated permanent address account for 4% and 2%, respectively. The student body at UH Hilo is claimed to be more racially and ethnically diverse than at any other higher education institution in the United States: For full-time students in fall of 2023, the largest racial/ethnic group consisted of students who identified as native Hawaiian (32%) and other large racial/ethnic groups include students who identify as White (23%), as Filipino (7%), as Japanese (5%), or as having mixed heritage (14%). About two-thirds of the students (63%) identify as female. One-third of students are Pell grant recipients and 23% are the first in their immediate family to attend college. All of the above demographic data is drawn from UH Hilo's Special Visit report or provided by the institution.

UH Hilo received full accreditation from WASC in 1976. Reaffirmations were awarded in 1984, 1989, and 1994. A special visit was conducted in 1997, followed by a capacity and preparatory review in 2003 and an educational effectiveness review in 2004. Special visits took place in 2008 and 2009. A reaffirmation review in 2014 led to a Commission action in 2015 that required UH Hilo to file an interim report in 2017. The last reaffirmation visit in April 2022 led to the issuance of a Formal Notice of Concern by the Commission in July 2022 and the scheduling of this special visit to address (1) integration of all strategic plans, (2) improvement of assessment of student learning and program review, and (3) building institutional research capacity to develop a data-informed culture.

B. Description of Team's Review Process

The Special Visit review team was established on February 16th, 2023, and the team chair emailed a team letter on February 1, 2024, outlining the general timeline and proposed member assignments for the Special Visit. Upon receipt of the UH Hilo Special Visit Report, team members worked asynchronously to complete their assigned sections of the Special Visit team worksheet. The review team then met via Zoom on March 8, 2024, to discuss their preliminary findings, confirm team member roles and responsibilities, and start developing the visit schedule and list of requested additional materials. The assistant chair then worked with the UH Hilo Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) to finalize the visit schedule and obtain the requested additional materials prior to the visit. The Special Visit began informally with an evening team session on Tuesday, April 9, 2024, where the team reviewed the visit schedule and finalized the leads, questions, and discussion items for each session during the visit.

The formal visit began on the morning of Wednesday, April 10, 2024, with sessions with the chancellor, the strategic plan reconciliation team, and faculty congress leadership. These meetings set the stage for the remainder of the visit, which included meetings with various individuals (i.e., ALO, interim vice chancellor of academic affairs, vice chancellor of administrative affairs, interim institutional research director,) and organizational groups and units (i.e., assessment committee, academic deans and directors, chairs from recent program reviews, enrollment management, program assessment, chancellor's executive committee, data dashboards and CSU student success analytics certification program participants, community advisory board), and three separate open forums with faculty, staff, and students. Prior to and throughout the visit, a confidential WSCUC-based email address was available to the campus community, and received communications were considered by the review team. The Special Visit

ended on Friday, April 12, with a private meeting between the team chair and chancellor followed by a public exit meeting where the team chair presented findings in the form of commendations and recommendations.

The various visit sessions were productive and collegial, and the review team was impressed by the level of commitment of faculty, staff, students, and administrators to their campus mission and community. The team was particularly appreciative of the responsiveness of the ALO to various questions and requests during the visit. Prior to, during, and following the visit, designated first and second writers developed their team report sections based on review of the UH Hilo Special Visit Report, the team worksheet, inspection of additional documentation and information provided by UH Hilo, and findings from the various sessions during the visit.

C. Institution's Special Report: Quality and Rigor of the Report and Supporting Evidence

The UH Hilo Special Visit Report provided a concise overview of institutional progress on the three issues identified in the Commission's July 2022 action letter. The report began with an introductory section overviewing the institution and the students it serves, the Commission's 2022 actions and three issues for the Special Visit, recent changes in academic programs and administrative leadership, and the preparation process for the report. The preparation process was stated to have begun in the summer of 2023, leads for the three issue-focused sections of the report were identified in September of 2023, with authorship varying by section among the chancellor, three vice chancellors, chair of the faculty congress, IR analyst, and ALO. Explicit acknowledgement of formative narrative input was noted at the end of each section, with faculty input being largely limited to the program review and assessment section.

The report provided an extensive evidence-based section demonstrating progress in program review and assessment since the last Accreditation Visit. In contrast, the section on

strategic planning and shared governance was extremely short (less than two pages excluding three extensive quotes from the 2022 team report), and presented limited material progress in reconciling strategic plans that had grown from two to three since the last visit. The section on building IR capacity represented a middle ground between the above two sections with regards to detail and demonstrated progress by explaining how staffing challenges had challenged progress on this front and overviewing how the development and deployment of data dashboards modeled those within the California State University (CSU) system and participation of three cohorts through the CSU Student Success Analytics certification program were being used to build institutional capacity for data-informed decision-making. The section also outlined how these efforts had contributed to broader conversations around defining student success and concluded with efforts around strategic enrollment management and transparent communication.

The review team's examination of the Special Visit Report raised some questions about general progress in the three focus areas since the report's submission, and the ALO kindly provided a concise update prior to the visit.

SECTION II – EVALUATION OF ISSUES UNDER THE STANDARDS

Special Visit Focus I: Strategic Planning and Shared Governance

The team report for the 2022 Reaffirmation of Accreditation noted that “*the strategic plan released by the chancellor articulates one vision for UH Hilo, while the alternate document released by the Faculty Congress articulates a different vision. The mere existence of two documents that express divergent futures for the institution highlights one of the most pressing issues facing UH Hilo: the lack of a shared sense of purpose. (CFR 4.6) The institution is urged to open lines of communication across campus and engage in authentic shared governance.*” The report further noted that “*the strategic plan and strategic vision have different goals, pointing to*

the needs for the administration and faculty to work collaboratively in reconciling the two documents into a single campus plan (CFRs 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). This reconciled campus plan should be the first step toward the development of an academic plan, which the team learned is scheduled to be drafted during the academic year 2022-2023.”

While the 2022 Reaffirmation of Accreditation Report specifically recommended that the Papahana Ho‘olālā Hikiāloa - Strategic Plan: 2021-2031 be reconciled with the UH Hilo Community-Anchored Strategic Vision for 2030, the Special Visit Report from UH Hilo noted that three different strategic plans now existed, with the third being the UH Hilo Hawai‘i Papa O Ke Ao Plan finalized by the Hanakahi Council after the Reaffirmation of Accreditation. This council is a campus-based group of faculty and staff who are Native Hawaiian or associated with campus programs or departments in Hawaiian Studies, Hawaiian language, or Hawaiian education or targeted to serve Native Hawaiian students. The Council’s three thematic goals are leadership, community engagement, and Hawaiian language and culture parity.

According to Section Two of the Special Visit Report, the chancellor asked that the campus align the two strategic plans. In order to begin that reconciliation, a meeting in December 2022 was held with the Chancellor's Executive Committee (comprised of 25 members), the Faculty Congress Leadership, and members of the Hanakahi Council to “*share perspectives and to set the stage for the collaborative effort to reconcile and harmonize the plans.*” The chancellor-identified leads of the three plans (i.e., interim vice chancellor of academic affairs, vice chancellor for administrative affairs, and chair of the faculty congress) continued this conversation through meetings on April 19, June 5, and August 11 of 2023. The week before the Special Visit, the chancellor again asked these leads to develop a timeline for completing the “harmonization” (the word used by the three representatives) of the multiple

plans. This timeline was shared orally with the team. No other substantive progress from these efforts were presented in the Special Visit Report or to the team during the Special Visit.

During the Special Visit, the chancellor attributed challenges to further progress in “harmonizing” these strategic plans to changes in administrative leadership roles and the team learned that a “Strategic Plan Reconciliation” team comprised of the interim vice chancellor of academic affairs, the vice chancellor for administrative affairs, and the chair of the faculty congress had met on April 1, 2024, just ten days prior to the Special Visit. During a Special Visit session with these three individuals, they shared that they now had a timeline, were in general agreement regarding how these plans could be reconciled, and stated that the reconciled and harmonized Strategic Plan would be completed by the end of 2024 with implementation by January 2025. No documentation was shared with the Special Visit team, and the team expressed concerns as to whether this timeline was realistic given the absence of faculty during the summer months and the lack of progress over the previous two years. As the committee members continued talking about their plans during the session, it became clear to the team that they were still strongly divided regarding key elements that would need to be reconciled across the plans, such as the significant enrollment declines at UH Hilo and the role of community engagement. The impasse between Faculty Congress and administration reinforced the team’s prior concerns about shared governance at the institution, and the team was unconvinced that the group had the directive or ability to complete this work.

During the visit, multiple administrators stated that substantive progress had been made on various aspects of the [Papahana Ho‘olālā Hikiāloa - Strategic Plan: 2021-2031](#), which the chancellor characterized as the “official” UH Hilo plan in her initial meeting with the review team. The [UH Hilo strategic plan website](#) provides substantial context and exposition around this

plan and its three major goals (i.e., *Strengthen Commitment to Haumāna: Equity and Student Success*, *Strengthen Commitment to ‘Āina- and Community-based Education*, and *Strengthen Commitment to Kākou, Our Campus ‘Ohan*). However, a review of the website-embedded Tableau-based [Strategic Planning Dashboard](#) revealed that none of its 27 deliverable-specific pages (each associated with one of 25 action plans distributed among nine strategies in service to the three goals) showed any clear evidence of updating since 2022.

Relatedly, as outlined in pages 10 and 11 of their Special Visit Report, UH Hilo has recently transformed their “Student Success Leadership Team” into the *Ka ‘i i ka Wēkiu* (Elevating Student Success) initiative, which they frame as a key step for engaging a broader campus cross-section to “*lead in putting action to the plans.*” Launched in January of 2024, this initiative is designed to promote idea generation through four *kime* (teams) focused on enrollment, student engagement, student support, and workplace culture, with the emerging ideas envisioned as the means to “*create new action items for the campus to implement with the larger strategic goals in mind.*” While these *kime* may very well successfully generate various “means to ends” for the yet-to-be reconciled strategic plans, the review team was concerned that this operation approach could be conflated with the existing strategic plans and their future reconciliation process. This concern comports with views expressed during the open forum with faculty, where confusion and uncertainty existed around the number of plans, the plan for their reconciliation, where to find information on strategic processes and progress, and the conflation of the *kime* team titles with strategic goals.

Based on the above and conversations with various other constituents during the Special Visit, the team did not sense sufficient leadership or urgency to address the Commissions’ directive for “*Integration of all strategic plans*” for this Special Visit in service to their broader

recommendation to *“Reconcile the 2021-2031 Strategic Plan with the UH Hilo Community-Anchored Strategic Vision for 2030. Ensure the forthcoming academic plan is aligned with the reconciled campus plan.”* (CFRs 1.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

Regarding shared governance on campus, several individuals, including at the open forum for faculty, expressed dismay and concern that shared governance had “gotten worse” since the Accreditation Visit in 2022. Members of the Faculty Congress took the initiative to research and develop a shared governance policy based on discussion with members of other campus senates and congresses, and a review of several other campuses’ policies. The UH Hilo Faculty Congress voted to approve a shared governance policy and sent it to the chancellor. According to Faculty Congress leaders and a document, the chancellor acknowledged receipt of the shared governance policy. The proposed policy was never agreed to by the chancellor and her refusal to approve the proposal continues to be a source of frustration for the Faculty Congress. The team concluded that there continues to be deep tension between faculty leadership and the administration. After meeting with approximately thirty members of the faculty in an open forum, it became clear to the team that communication remains poor and distrust of administration remains high.

Special Visit Focus II: Program Review and Assessment

During the 2022 Accreditation Visit, the team observed that very few degree programs had engaged in the program review process since 2016. The institution acknowledged that the program review process had effectively stopped in 2018, but had recently restarted in the 2019/2020 academic year following a redesign of the guidelines and a format that included both faculty and external review of student achievement of program learning outcome assessments. Faculty within each degree program had recently developed program learning outcome

statements and detailed assessment plans that included rubrics, signature assignments, and curriculum maps, but very few program learning outcomes had actually been assessed. The 2022 review team did, however, acknowledge UH Hilo for its work in assessing WSCUC core competencies at the institutional level, and it was clear that the ALO had engaged with university faculty in meaningful assessments. Findings from those assessments were analyzed, and the faculty demonstrated instances in which they had used data to close the loop on key findings. As a result, the review team determined that UH Hilo was doing satisfactory work in assessing core competencies, and that this topic would not be a focus of the special visit in 2024. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3)

The Special Visit team was encouraged to read in the 2024 Special Visit Institutional Report that UH Hilo had made substantial progress in program review, with program review information for each degree (e.g., self study, review findings, institutional responses) shared on a well-organized website. The institution had also surveyed program chairs to determine the extent to which they found the program review process meaningful, and survey results indicated a positive shift in attitude about the benefits of program review. While there were still some complaints about the process, these complaints focused primarily on the lack of response by deans and central administration following the program review. (CFRs 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

During the Special Visit, the team met with several groups to discuss UH Hilo's progress in program review. In meetings with academic chairs, faculty assessment committee, department chairs, faculty, the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, and the ALO, the team was informed that almost all programs had completed or were in the process of completing program reviews, with only a few programs remaining and slated to be reviewed in 2024/2025. Evidence of the program reviews on the university's website confirmed that the institution had made

substantial progress in the area of program review, and during a Special Visit session, program chairs and faculty were able to articulate how they had made significant improvements to degree programs using data and evidence from the program review process. The team noted a few complaints by program chairs about the time-consuming nature of pulling data and employing manual processes to sort and disaggregate information from the office of institutional research. Program chairs also noted that the new data dashboards were still being introduced to the community, and the new interim director of institutional research had only been in place for a short time. The team expects these concerns to be addressed as the new interim institutional research director and data dashboards provide greater institutional capacity and improvement for institutional research functions (see next section of this report). The other complaint that arose from discussions with program chairs and faculty was a need for improved clarity and communication from deans and the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs regarding the allocation of resources that might be recommended as a result of the program review. (CFRs 2.4, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

In the team's meeting with the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, the team was encouraged to hear that they were aware of the need for greater communication with degree program faculty and plans to align program review processes with strategic plan goals once the strategic plans have been reconciled. They were also aware of the historically cynical culture among faculty around program review, and understood that greater communication and administrative action would be needed to overcome the lingering hesitation among faculty. (CFRs 1.7, 2.7, 3.7, 4.3, 4.5)

The team commends UH Hilo faculty for their progress in program review and recommends that the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs follow through with plans to

create greater communication between degree program faculty, chairs, deans, and the chancellor's office after each program review. (CFRs 1.7, 2.7, 3.7, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

In the area of program learning outcome (PLO) assessment, the team learned from its meetings with faculty, program chairs, and the ALO that each degree program had completed the first year of a multi-year cycle of PLO assessment. Each degree program assessed at least one of its PLOs using best practices, analyzing data to develop evidence-based approaches to improve the curriculum. The team was impressed by the described processes and experiences heard from faculty and chairs about how they found the PLO assessments to be meaningful and effective. Faculty and chairs felt supported in their work by the ALO, who had conducted numerous individual meetings to help them design rubrics and strategies for converting tests into assessments and to employ meaningful methods for assessing PLOs that encouraged deep reflection on the results. A faculty survey demonstrated that the institution's faculty appears to have turned a corner on programmatic assessment into a more positive direction. The team was concerned to hear that some programs with nine or more PLOs were not planning to assess more than one PLO per year. The team pointed out and faculty acknowledged, at the current pace, that it would take nearly ten years to complete one assessment cycle for all PLOs. The team recommends that degree programs attempt to complete a cycle of PLO assessment in a time frame that aligns with program reviews, thereby enabling a comprehensive view of student achievement each time a program review is conducted. Noting that exception, the team commends UH Hilo faculty for their meaningful engagement with PLO assessment and encourages them to continue making progress in assessment of each of their learning outcomes. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4)

In this section, the team wishes to acknowledge a misunderstanding during its session with the faculty of the Assessment Committee. The team assumed that this committee would be able to shed light on the status of PLO assessment by degree programs, but it became apparent during the session that the ALO had assembled this group to discuss the institution's progress on the WSCUC core competency assessment. After the meeting, the ALO met the team to clarify that the Assessment Committee was not the appropriate group to comment on the PLO assessment and that faculty members were somewhat upset that they had not been given an opportunity by the team to present their continued progress in core competency assessment. The team notes that the institution had already been acknowledged for its work in core competency assessment during the 2022 Accreditation Visit, and that therefore core competency assessment was not a focus of the Special Visit. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6)

The team finds that UH Hilo faculty, working with the ALO, have made acceptable progress in program review and PLO assessment. (CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

Special Visit Focus III: Institutional Research Capacity and Student Success

In their 2022 Action Letter, the Commission identified “building IR capacity to develop a data-informed culture” as the third focus for a 2022 Special Visit and in service to two of their eight recommendations (i.e., *3. Develop a shared understanding of student success and track disaggregated metrics that reflect this understanding to better support students and identify and address barriers to graduation. (CFRs 1.2, 2.10, 4.1)* and *4. Institutionalize a culture of data-informed decision making and expand the capacity and role of the Office of Institutional Research. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)*). During the April 2022 Accreditation Visit, the UH Hilo Institutional Research Office (IRO) was staffed by an institutional research analyst, but no director, and the 2022 review team noted in their report that “*having a director in place is needed*

to support UH Hilo 's administration, faculty, and students in utilizing data to inform organizational planning and decisions, conduct systematic assessment of teaching and learning, and gauge the campus environment.” (CFRs 4.1, 4.2) In their 2024 Special Visit report, UH Hilo stated that (following multiple failed searches to fill the open IRO director position) a new IRO director was hired in August of 2023, but resigned in September 2023, and that the “position should be filled with an interim appointment before the team visit in April.”

On February 1, 2024, the individual serving as the director of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Title IX coordinator was transferred to the UH Hilo IRO as interim IRO director. The diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specialist in the EEO office was also transferred to the IRO, increasing IRO staffing from one institutional analyst to a staff of three. While the new interim IRO director has knowledge and expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods, professional development is being supported to upskill the capacity of the IRO staff and the director in higher education institutional assessment.

The new interim director discussed professional development plans, including UH Hilo joining the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) as an institutional member and plans for the director and institutional analyst to attend the 2024 AIR Forum annual conference in May 2024. UH Hilo had recently started a third cohort of faculty and staff participating in the California State University (CSU) Student Success Data Analytics program. The new interim IRO director joined the third cohort that started the program in January 2024. Additionally, the new interim IRO director is receiving support from the system-level UH Institutional Planning and Research Program Office.

During the Special Visit, the team learned of plans for a study of “leavers and stayers” scheduled to be administered to current UH Hilo students to gain insight into their plans for

registration for the fall 2024 semester. The survey intends to understand students' needs better to develop strategies to increase student retention. The team was informed that NSSE is the only other instrument that captures students' perceptions of the campus climate, and this survey is administered every three years, with the last being in 2022. The team encourages UH Hilo and the IR office to increase its efforts to better understand the reasons for the significant enrollment declines that challenge the institution. (CFRs 2.10, 4.2)

The new interim IRO director also conducted listening sessions with the deans and directors of each of the six colleges and has attended meetings of the Faculty Congress and the chancellor's executive committee meetings to understand data and institutional research needs of various constituencies to identify strategies to increase data capacity and a data-informed culture.

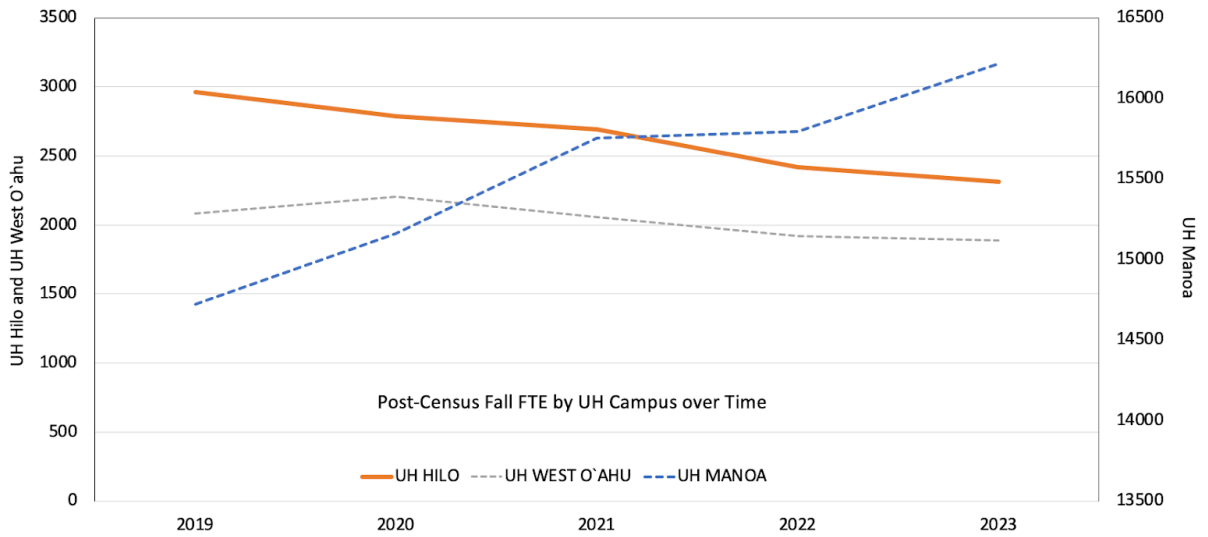
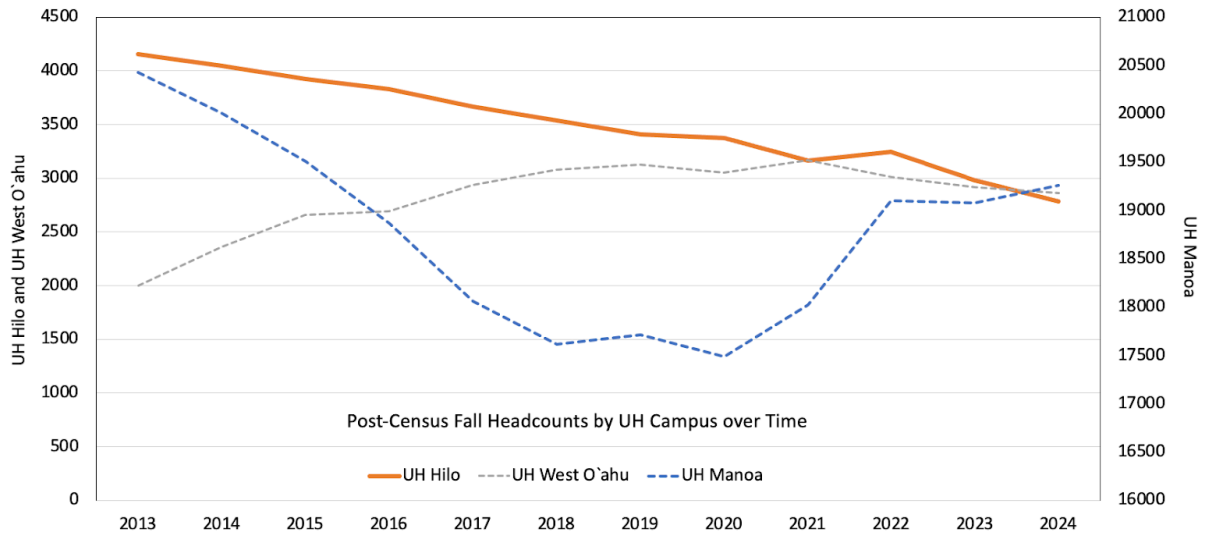
The review team met with assessment coordinators representing several programs that had recently conducted program review assessments, as well as deans and directors of the six colleges, to learn how the data dashboards launched in the fall 2023 semester have been utilized to inform program review. While the data dashboards have been a valuable tool for accessing data to analyze their respective programs, several faculty members expressed a need for tools to provide access to data across programs to more readily allow comparative data analysis among programs. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

The Special Visit team identified several promising initial steps recently implemented to address the recommendations to increase data capacity and have a consistent understanding of student success across stakeholder groups. However, the new interim IRO director had only been in the position for two months at the time of the visit. The deans and directors had recently been trained on the data dashboards, and the two cohorts that had completed the CSU Student Success Data Analytics program still needed to implement projects to demonstrate the impact on UH Hilo

student success. Consequently, the team needed more evidence to determine how these recent undertakings and plans would impact UH Hilo's data capacity and culture. The team recommends that these nascent initiatives continue to progress to institutionalize a culture of data-informed decision-making and develop Institutional Research capacity. (CFR 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

SECTION III – OTHER TOPICS, AS APPROPRIATE

Similar to other institutions in higher education, UH Hilo has suffered demographic, economic, and pandemic-related challenges in recent years that directly or indirectly impact the financial position of the institution. Headcount enrollment has declined from 3,243 in fall 2021 to 2,977 in fall of 2022 (8.2%), and from 2,977 in fall of 2023 to 2,781 in fall of 2024 (6.6%). This decline over the last two years is consistent with a broader steady decline in headcount over the last ten years (top graph below; data from <https://data.hawaii.edu/>), which stands in contrast to the parabolic headcount pattern shown by the much larger UH Manoa campus and the plateauing of the now-comparably-sized UH West O`ahu campus. This decline is also evident in available full-time-equivalent enrollment data patterns (bottom graph below; data from <https://data.hawaii.edu/>). Tuition and Fees Special Revenue has commensurately decreased 22% from \$31.9 million in FY2020 to \$24.8 million in FY2023. As previously noted in the 2022 team report and re-iterated in this Special Visit, UH Hilo continues to be focused on improving retention as a solution to its financial challenges, but this continued enrollment decline placed UH Hilo in substantial risk if long term solutions are not explored to ensure financial stability. (CFR 3.4)



UH Hilo has continued to utilize reserves for the last three fiscal years. The review team was informed that planned one-time expenditures of approximately \$7.3M were drawn from the Tuition and Fees Special Fund Reserves for use in FY2024—an amount representing 9.5% of the overall budget. The CFO pointed to the federal funding received through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) during the pandemic as a way to address campus priorities and deferred maintenance. Although such reserve usage to cover temporary budget shortfalls can

alleviate immediate pressures, continuing such usage may create challenges for future budget cycles if underlying structural issues are not addressed.

UH Hilo is making an effort to engage stakeholders and to build a sense of shared responsibility. The review team learned of a relatively new resource allocation process implemented by administration wherein university stakeholders were given the opportunity to submit budget ideas for consideration. Given that over a hundred such proposals were received and in light of the current budget constraints, the review team inquired about the timing of the “call for proposals” given reserve usage and learned that the CFO will be the primary decision-maker for proposal prioritization and funding. The team expressed concerns that such an approach could counteract broader efforts to increase communication and transparency around fiscal challenges. If this approach continues, then the institution might consider developing a more inclusive decision-making process as well as criteria for proposal evaluations to ensure transparency and model shared governance.

It is essential for UH Hilo to consider the implications for future financial stability throughout the budget development process. The team is concerned about the institution’s compliance with Standard 3. The continued use of reserves is a strong indicator that the fiscal viability of the institution is at a critical juncture. The transient increase in the reserve balance through the HERFF may have created a false sense of stability by masking key indicators of financial distress during budgetary planning. The solution to economic recovery by way of enrollment management strategies cannot be the sole focus of the institution. A detailed, multi-year budget plan with an emphasis on revenue generation and other cost reducing measures will enable the institution to evaluate different scenarios, assess the potential outcomes of various initiatives, and choose the best course of action. The UH system has adopted a

six-year forecast, and UH Hilo may consider adopting a similar campus-level financial model. Such a multi-year budget would serve as a valuable tool for financial planning, management, and governance, and enable the institution to navigate challenges and seize opportunities while remaining focused on short- and long-term financial goals that integrate and align with institutional resources and priorities. (CFR 3.4)

SECTION IV – FINDINGS, COMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Special Visit team was disappointed to find that, over the 18 months since the Commission’s issuance of a Notice of Concern in July 2022, little progress had been made in reconciling the separate strategic plan documents into a single unified campus plan—a specific Commission charge for this Special Visit. Furthermore, the Special Visit team was disappointed to find little progress in strengthening communication across campus and improving shared governance. In addition, the team learned that enrollment has continued to decline with no comprehensive enrollment management plan in place, and this enrollment decline has had a negative impact on the campus budget, leading to the utilization of institutional reserves this year and potentially in the years ahead. UH Hilo continues to focus on improving retention as a solution to its financial challenges, but this continued enrollment decline places the campus at substantial risk if long-term solutions are not explored to ensure financial stability.

The team commends UH Hilo for:

1. Faculty embracing the process of program review, drawing on data and evidence to make informed decisions regarding program improvements.
2. Faculty launching a robust, multi-year cycle of program learning outcomes assessment, employing best practices and using findings to improve curriculum.
3. Faculty Congress taking the initiative to develop a shared governance policy informed by extensive research.

The team recommends UH Hilo:

1. Develop a unified public Strategic Plan that reconciles the three current plans, specifically the *UHH Papahana Ho‘olālā Hikiāloa Strategic Plan: 2021-2031*, the *UH Hilo Hawai‘i Papa O Ke Ao Plan*, and the *UH Hilo Community-Anchored Strategic Vision for 2030*. (CFRs 4.6, 4.7)
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive enrollment management plan that addresses UHH’s significant enrollment decline through specific actions designed to meet an enrollment target. (CFRs 2.10, 3.4)
3. Establish explicit pathways that enhance clear two-way communication among all campus constituents around university policies, processes, and decision-making. (CFRs 1.7, 3.7)
4. Institutionalize a culture of data-informed decision-making and develop Institutional Research capacity. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)
5. Adopt a proactive approach to financial planning by developing a multi-year budget plan, including any anticipated use of reserves, to ensure greater fiscal sustainability. (CFRs 3.4, 3.7, 4.7)