LISTENING TOUR 2010: MEETING FOR THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
NATURAL SCIENCES DIVISION
OCTOBER 27TH 2010

This note represents a summary of the meeting held for the College of Arts and Sciences Natural Sciences Division (CAS: NSD) on October 27th 2010 as part of the 2010 Listening Tour to prepare for development of the next UH Hilo Strategic Plan. The summary reflects the collection of individual comments made, not necessarily the consensus view of the entire group or the official view of UH Hilo. The order of the note may not necessarily reflect the order of the discussion.

Strengths of UH Hilo
The group identified the following as key strengths of UH Hilo:

- Location
  - The university’s semi-rural location attracts students who prefer such a setting compared to a city-based university (e.g. students from other pacific islands)
  - The unique natural environment helps the university attract high quality science faculty as it provides research opportunities in their discipline

- Diverse student population

- CAS: NSD
  - The NSD offers a range of science programs that are able to take advantage of the university’s unique location on the Big Island. Science can therefore be undertaken that is applicable to the location, thereby enhancing the learning experience for students and facilitating research.

- Friendly, open, helpful campus

- External partnerships
  - Close ties with the local community
  - Close ties with other research agencies on the Big Island, within the state, nationally and internationally. NSD has built/is building partnerships with university's internationally who want to partner with UH Hilo – the university’s location facilitates this as the university has access to unique natural resources/phenomena

- Small class sizes
Small class sizes means that faculty are able to get to know students well which helps faculty write students strong letters of recommendation for jobs once they graduate – which could give UH Hilo graduates an edge of others coming from much larger university’s

- Quality faculty
  - Faculty committed to supporting students

- Focus on undergraduates
  - Undergraduates are encouraged to participate in research projects

- Opportunity to develop select graduate/professional programs

- Programs that work with K-12 students
  - Supporting the STEM pipeline

- Relatively affordable tuition

- The university’s Hawaiian language and culture programs are seen as a model for other indigenous languages

- Integration of Native Hawaiian values beyond Hawaiian studies

- Wide variety of degree programs for our size

**Weaknesses of UH Hilo**

The group identified the following as key weaknesses of UH Hilo:

- Infrastructure
  - Growing faster than the infrastructure we need
  - No NSD conference room (inequitable compared to the other CAS divisions)
  - Lack of research space, classrooms and laboratories
  - Lack of equipment

- Lack of attention to the sciences by the UH Hilo administration

- Underprepared students
  - Whilst this is recognized as a nationwide issue, the administration and faculty do not appear to have a coherent policy or action plan about how to address it at UH Hilo. Should, for instance, the policy be to increase admission requirements or to improve remedial support for students?
    - Remedial support for students at the university is improving (e.g. Kilohana) but more should be done. Students need training in core general education requirements like solving mathematical word problems.
• The university should look to do more with K-12 students and the community college to better prepare/provide remedial support for students.
  • Re: the community college, a logistical issue was noted that if a student is enrolled at UH Hilo and also wants to enroll at the community college to undertake some form of remedial course then that student has to pay tuition at both institutions. Another issue is that Hawaii Community College also has space/infrastructure issues so would then even be able to support additional students from UH Hilo requiring remedial support?

• Lack of cohesion among faculty across the board
  o Lack of standards (e.g. for teaching, assessment) and policies
  o Poor communication

• Lack of professional development opportunities for faculty

• Poor retention rates
  o Especially for freshman and sophomores

• Poor graduation rates
  o There is also difficulty in accurately reporting graduation rates as the usual number reported only takes into account graduations from UH Hilo – it doesn’t take into account students who may have studied at the UH Hilo, transferred and graduated at another institution. That is, how can we track students who leave UH Hilo and get credit for intermediate successes.

• Lack of focus and priorities
  o The university is trying to be too many things to too many people and has stretched itself too thin

• No clearly defined pathway to implement the strategic plan

• Lack of focus on teaching
  o There is an overall lack of support for teaching in terms of equipment, people and space (e.g. classrooms, labs)
    ▪ A dedicated teaching center to advise faculty on teaching methods and standards (as an objective 3rd party) would be helpful

• Lack of support for research
  o There is a perception that research has taken much higher prominence at UH Hilo in recent years but this has not be backed-up by improvements to the research infrastructure or rewarded by the administration
  o Research not built into the curriculum
  o The research process is not well supported by the administration
  o Lack of staff support for the research process – once a faculty have been awarded a grant they have to a lot of the administrative tasks relating to the grant themselves (e.g.
recruit research assistants, run reports, prepare budgets) which takes time away from the research itself
  ○ Lack of credit for undertaking research
  ○ Lack of transparency (e.g. where does top-sliced research money go to?)

- Faculty capacity in NSD is not keeping up with the divisions growth

- Lack of technical support for basic AV equipment
  ○ Many faculty have to maintain such equipment themselves
  ○ There appears to be inconsistent equipment allocation across campus

**Challenges for UH Hilo**
The group identified the following as challenges for UH Hilo:

- Oahu-centric distribution of funds and articulation

- Retention of leading administrators so that there are periods of stabilization rather than constant change

- How to develop additional study places for students

**Priorities for UH Hilo**
The group suggested that UH Hilo should focus on the following priorities over the coming years:

- Infrastructure
  ○ Develop more research space and permanent buildings

- Support for teaching and coordinated perspectives on teaching
  ○ There is currently little coordination between faculty and the Advising center. The Advising center would be better able to advise students on majors if center staff and faculty worked more collaboratively together.

- Improve coordination, communication and transparency across the campus

- Get buy-in to the strategic plan to enable its implementation

- Increase the number of tenure-track faculty

- Develop an identity for UH Hilo that faculty, staff and students can identify with

- Ensure good work is recognized

**Appropriateness of the Current UHH Strategic Goals**
This question was not asked of the group due to lack of time but members were invited to submit any comments on the current goals direct to the facilitator, Siân Millard at uuhplan@hawaii.edu, or through the companion survey to the listening tour (www.surveymonkey.com/listening).