LISTENING TOUR 2010: MEETING WITH THE UH HILO STUDENT ASSOCIATION AND CHARTERED STUDENT ORGANIZATION OFFICERS OCTOBER 25TH 2010

This note represents a summary of the meeting held with the UH Hilo Student Association and Chartered Student Organization Officers on October 25th, 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**
  - Attracts people from other locations as well as enabling those local to the Big Island/State of Hawaii to stay at home and study here.
  - Low cost of living in Hilo
    - The university should capitalize on these points in its marketing to mainland schools

- **Good diversity and aloha spirit**

- **Generally safe campus**
  - This needs to get more recognition

- **Personalized learning**
  - Small class sizes offer greater interaction between students and professors. Students are not just a number in the classroom.
  - The College of Pharmacy (CoP) was particularly highlighted as an excellent example of how faculty support their students. CoP classes have approx 90 students and yet all CoP faculty make effort to spend time with each student, and get involved in student-community activities.

- **Eclectic professors**
  - Professors bring different views and experiences to the classroom which benefits students by being exposed to different points of view and teaching styles

- **Student perspectives matter**
Positive relationship between students and the administration
Students always have opportunity to sit on campus-wide committees and be involved in policy-making

- Comparatively affordable/cheap tuition
  - For in-state and out-of-state students

- Good student services
  - Campua Recreation Department
    - Student Life Center is a major asset to the university – ¼ of the student population go through the SLC doors every two days
  - Counselors and advising have good availability

- Specific academic programs/colleges
  - Ka Haka ʻUla and the College of Pharmacy in particular are perceived to be taking the university in a good direction. Ka Haka ʻUla is a leading center of indigenous language revitalization, and the College of Pharmacy, the only such college in the state, has been successful in attaching local businesses to university events (e.g. Safeway, Longs).

- Good legislative support for the university

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

- Infrastructure
  - Lack of parking
  - Lack of student housing
  - Poor maintenance (e.g. there are still bathrooms out of use in the K building)

- Lack of school spirit and pride
  - People need to be made more aware of what there is to feel proud of at UH Hilo. We need to market ourselves to our faculty, staff and students, as well as to the outside world.
  - School pride/spirit could be boosted by a stronger athletics program

- Identity
  - UH Hilo needs to develop its own strong identity – of itself and within the UH System - to stop being compared to, and comparing itself to, UH Manoa.
  - Students, staff and faculty need to be empowered to defend UH Hilo against negative criticism – a stronger identity and improved marketing/publicity around our key achievements will help people do this.

- UH System constraints
  - UH Hilo needs its own financial office
  - Lack of clarity in processes and procedures (particularly fiscal)
• Teaching quality
  o Whilst not across the board, there are instances of poor teaching quality at UH Hilo (Natural Sciences Division and College of Pharmacy faculty were noted as exceptions). This was wide ranging to reports of faculty apathy and poor attitude towards teaching, to lack of support to students by not offering consistent office hours out of class time.
  o Some classes are not challenging enough for students though it was noted that this is not the case across the board and it depends on the professor.
  o Lack of qualified teachers to teach programs that would be unique to UH Hilo (e.g. politics of Hawaii)
    ▪ Teaching and curriculum standards need to be improved

• Lack of job opportunities
  o On and off campus
  o There is a perception that nepotism is common where family/friends of current employees are favored over other students applying for the same position. There therefore needs to be greater transparency in the hiring process for on-campus position and greater monitoring of hiring practices.
  o There are many students who qualify for work/study but can’t get a job
    ▪ UH Hilo needs to develop more job opportunities for students

• Communication
  o Limited communication between departments. If faculty across different departments liaised more closely on common skill/learning areas there would be less duplication of effort and the students learning experience would be more seamless (e.g. training in statistical skills)

• College in a town, not a college town
  o UH Hilo has good examples of where the university is engaging with the community (e.g. College of Pharmacy students involvement in community projects), but this is patchy and as a result some members of the community do not know much about UH Hilo or the good research/activities that go here. This lack of communication in some ways perhaps contributes to the sense that UH Hilo is a college within a town, not a college town.

• Lack of student-life activities
  o No fraternities on campus
    ▪ There are no social fraternities on campus – development of such groups may help improve school spirit
    ▪ However, it was noted that the absence of social fraternities could also be considered a strength as the fraternities that do exist are academically focused.
  o Lack of night-life on campus
    ▪ ‘The Flow’ has been developed which is a step in the right direction, but more is needed to help keep students close to campus.
• One way to solve this would be for the administration to encourage students to form their own hang-out spots.

Address weaknesses
• One of the key ways to help address UH Hilo’s weaknesses would be for the administration to seek student views more often via open face-to-face meetings – rather than relying on surveys or emails. Getting people together to talk about the issues facing the campus and suggesting ideas to solve them will help shows that the administration really cares about student views and gets students directly involved in, and therefore taking ownership for, improvements to the campus/campus life/their learning.

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

• Community ownership
  o How to encourage greater ownership of the university by the Big Island community
    ▪ CoP is a good example of how we are making progress here given the high level of community interaction (reciprocal) that CoP students and faculty have

• Increased out-of-state cap
  o How to manage potential friction between a greater number of off-islanders and local people given the rise in the out-of-state cap.
  o Diversity is a particular strength of UH Hilo, but integration is a challenge.

• Where to focus
  o The university is at high risk of spreading itself too thin. We need to focus our efforts more.

• Recognition within the UH System
  o UH Hilo and other campuses on the neighbor islands have historically had to ‘push’ to get noticed within the System compared to campuses on Oahu. This is perhaps the product of the UH System being housed at UH Manoa.
    ▪ It may be helpful if the UH System could hold the Board of Regents meetings more frequently on the neighbor islands.

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

• Clearly define our mission statement
  o Be clear about who we are and who we are here to serve
  o This needs to be at the institutional, college and department level

• Improve publicity and marketing
  o Get our message out – internally and externally
• Address workforce needs
  o Ensure that the programs we run serve Hawaii Island and address the workforce needs of the island and state

• Infrastructure
  o Develop the land we have to solve our infrastructural problems (e.g. parking, housing)
  o Expand the Campus Recreation Department
    ▪ Develop more facilities like the Student Life Center which has had such a major impact on the campus

• Develop the sports program
  o Form a football team

• Improve graduation and retention rates

• Improve and maintain academic quality (not quantity)
  o Look to build more technology into teaching and learning to offer different ways to learn/attend lectures (e.g. video lectures)

• Graduate programs
  o More people, generally, are looking to go to graduate school so expand the number of graduate programs, but only into areas where we can develop a particular niche or capitalize on a unique specialism.

• Develop and improve our distance learning activities

**Appropriateness of the Current UHH Strategic Goals**
The group discussed the current UHH strategic goals and made the following comments:

**General points:**
• The goals are not specific enough – they are too vague
• The goals seem to contain a lot of ‘buzz words’ but the actions to back those up are not clear

**Specific points:**
• Goal 1 – is good but needs something about connecting research opportunities to the natural environment
• Goal 4 – is particularly important as we need to attract more resources to be able to achieve whatever we set out to do. We therefore may need to look to specialize and be more selective in the programs we fund and develop.
• Goal 5 – is still relevant and represents an ongoing goal. It needs though to be more specific
• Goal 6 – how is this approached?