LISTENING TOUR 2010: MEETING WITH THE UH HILO ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
AUGUST 18TH 2010

This note represents a summary of the meeting held with the UH Hilo Alumni Association on August 18th 2010 as part of the 2010 Listening Tour to prepare for the 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:

- **Significant accomplishments**
  - UH Hilo has accomplished much despite its small size. In particular, the university has developed specialist programs and enjoyed strong community support for those (e.g. College of Pharmacy), and there are some outstanding programs including marine science, Hawaiian language/studies and pharmacy.

- **Small class sizes**
  - One to one relationship with faculty benefits students
  - Professors are accessible to students

- **Great faculty**

- **Growing student success rate**
  - Both in terms of the caliber of students that UH Hilo is starting to attract and the jobs that UH Hilo graduates are successfully moving into.

- **The university owns a great amount of land which means there is opportunity for growth over time.**

- **Natural learning environment**
  - UH Hilo is surrounded by a natural learning environment meaning that different programs can utilize different aspects of the environment

- **Accessibility**
  - Offers opportunity for higher education study for those students who can’t or don’t want to leave the Big Island
- UH Hilo demonstrates a strong commitment to educating people from the Pacific Islands

- Engaged community including excellent alumni’s

- UH Hilo is affordable for students
  - East Hawaii is one of the most affordable places in the state of Hawaii in terms of cost of living and housing

- Aloha spirit
  - The university’s ‘aloha spirit’ is a unique strength and appears to be more present at UHH that at other campuses within the UH System

- Diversity
  - Diverse nature of the campus gives a welcoming feel to all from different backgrounds – people don’t feel isolated
  - Hawaiianess of the campus reflects the university’s ‘home’

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

- Lack of distance learning programs

- Leadership and administration
  - There is a need for consistent, good leadership particularly in the upper administration as good leadership should start from the top and feed down to the rest of the campus
  - Lack of comprehensive planning
    - Operating in a siege mentality, being reactive rather than proactive
    - Lack of focus about what programs to invest in and which not

- Limited resources
  - Lack of money
  - Lack of capacity (teaching)

- Even though the university is steadily growing it is still small and therefore lacks ‘clout’ to be able to argue for more resources for more programs

- Infrastructure
  - Facility upgrades are required – e.g. College Hall Lack of student housing
  - Lack of parking

- Need to grow more of a ‘college town’ feel
  - Lack of transportation to and from campus inhibits that as students are not easily able to get to and from the town center
• Marketing and communication
  o Not enough support for marketing and branding which impacts on UH Hilo’s ability to market and promote itself effectively.
  o Website for students is not user friendly

• Low retention rates
  o UH Hilo is seen as the first stop on the academic path and then many students go elsewhere and don’t come back.

• Approach to recruiting students is weak
  o Few local Big Island students coming in
  o Need to grow the university through improved outreach

• Too slow to respond to opportunities
  o For example, the government sponsored program to fund veterans in their higher education studies. UH Hilo appears to missing an opportunity there to bring in a particular section of the community – especially given the number of veterans on the Big Island. The University should perhaps seek to develop a specialist Office of Veterans Affairs (as other university’s have) to support this sector of the community.

Challenges for UH Hilo
The term ‘challenge’ covers both opportunities and threats and where possible this distinction is made. The group identified the following as challenges for UH Hilo:

• Opportunity: Work better with the local High Schools and community colleges
  o Treat transition of students as a continuous pipeline
  o Re-examine how recruitment is done and identify needed changes

• Opportunity: Seek to encourage a ‘college-town’ feel by getting the community more interested in UH Hilo sports

• Opportunity: Trying to work successfully with the UH System
  o To ensure that UH Hilo gets its ‘fair share’
  o At the moment, things get done at UH Hilo in-spite of the System as there are local politicians who work hard to lobby for the university.
  o UHH is currently too stifled by System policies and rules to be creative
  o How to overcome the politics of the System
    ▪ Some programs should be situated here because of the environment but when decisions are made about new programs within the System UH Hilo seems to be overlooked.

• Opportunity: Improved community engagement/partnerships could have major positive impacts for both the university and the community
  o More research and development by UHH, and in partnership with local businesses/community groups, could have positive impact on local economy – the
university is placed well because of the natural resources available and its successful specialist programs in areas like computer science and pharmaceuticals.

- To achieve this, UH Hilo needs to work better at developing a reciprocal relationship with the community. This could be partly addressed by more UH Hilo senior faculty and staff giving their time to serve on community boards. At the moment, there is limited visibility of such faculty/staff in the community so it would be good to see the university giving back to the community in this way.

- Threat: How to deal with competition within the UH System and outside (eg. Brigham Young University and University of Phoenix)

- How to change peoples’ perceptions
  - Particularly on the neighbor islands as at the moment UHH not seen as good as Manoa. Added to that is a perception that UH Hilo is easier to pass than Manoa (maybe not as many requirements)
  - UH Hilo needs to work to become the ‘college of choice’
  - Primary perception of Hilo is that it is ‘rainy’ and therefore not as attractive as other universities. Compounded by this is a perceived lack of social life which makes it difficult to attract students from other islands
    - Need to promote and support UH Hilo as a ‘college town’
    - We need to promote ourselves better - improve our own self-esteem

- Accessibility
  - How to expand support to the West-side of the island
  - Island in the middle of the Pacific is difficult to get to

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

- Create an attractive environment for students
  - Work towards a ‘college-town’ feel and orient local politicians in this direction

- Improve facilities, infrastructure and marketing
  - All inter-related
  - Support for marketing is critically needed

- Improving enrollment

- Retention
  - Keep students here
  - Want to be the place where students want to stay
  - ‘Get them, keep them, have them stay’

- Decide which programs to promote and define resources/support needed to promote them properly
• Work in partnership with the community
  o Align resources with workforce needs and train students for jobs needed in the community
    ▪ E.g. UH Hilo should be training students now to be able to capitalize on jobs that will be created by the 30 meter telescope

• Change negative perceptions about UH Hilo
  o Work to do this first in-state (as the bulk of the state’s population is on Oahu) by providing more support to improve marketing to help better promote UH Hilo

• Improve long-term financial planning
  o Particularly for new capital infrastructure

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

**Specific points:**
• Goal 1 (maintain mix of liberal arts and professional programs) is ok and states clearly what the aim is but we need to assess if this is still our goal so we can clarify our direction

• Goal 2 (provide undergraduate and professional liberal arts programs) should refer to professional and graduate studies as well as undergraduate studies

• Goals 3 (learning environment) and 4 (obtaining sufficient resources) should be taken together

• Goal 4 (obtaining sufficient resources) is very important

• Goal 5 (community involvement) makes sense but it reads more like a strategy or an objective than a goal.
  o More needs to be done by UH Hilo to partner with the community. There is a feeling in the community that efforts are only made to engage the community when it suits UH Hilo
  o Not everybody in the community is currently engaged with UH Hilo and yet effective community partnerships are one of the university’s greatest opportunities.

**General points:**
• Language is too flowery

• The goals read more like a mission

• The goals should be realistic, specific and measurable

• There needs to be consistent assessment of UH Hilo’s progress towards its goals
- How do we know where we are and what we have achieved if there has been no assessment?
- There has to be measurement
- The Chancellor could give an annual ‘state of the university’ address to highlight accomplishments against the strategic plan and outline plans for the next year.

- A lot of goals are written down and ‘put on the shelf’ – the question that needs to be addressed is HOW to achieve the goals that UH Hilo will set for itself and HOW to determine if UH Hilo is effectively working towards meeting them.