Western Association of Schools & Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges & Universities

June 30, 2008

Dr. Rose Tseng
Chancellor
University of Hawaii at Hilo
200 West Kawili Street
Hilo, HI 96720-4091

Dear Chancellor Tseng:

At its meeting on June 18-20, 2008, the Senior Commission considered the report of the WASC Special Visit team that conducted the visit to the University of Hawaii at Hilo (UH Hilo) on March 18–20, 2008. The Commission also had access to the Special Visit Report prepared by the University prior to the visit and to the extensive response to the visiting team report dated May 23, 2008. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit, team report, and campus response with you and ALO April Komenaka in person, and with Academic Vice Chancellor Castille and representatives of the Hawaiian doctoral program, Kalena Silve and William Wilson, by phone. The comments were all most helpful.

The framework for the March visit was based on previous Commission recommendations and its call for a Special Visit. The Commission letter of June 25, 2004 cited a number of recommendations for institutional engagement and improvement. These recommendations included, among others, the need for:

- Expanding the University's funding base and establishing a set of institutional priorities, especially in light of limitations placed on funding by the resources allocation model utilized by the UH system;

- Ensuring that the University's governance structures are aligned with, and serve the needs of, the institution, especially regarding the two-tiered governance system;

- Increasing the diversity of the faculty and staff, and diffusing through the curriculum the key learning and insights of the University's Hawaiian Program;

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- Promoting campus-wide engagement in the assessment of student learning.

Subsequent Substantive Change approvals have required a review of the institution's newly established doctoral programs in Pharmacy and in Hawaiian and Indigenous Languages and Culture Revitalization [HILCR].

As this was a Special Visit, the team focused all of its attention on the issues indicated above. It commended the institution for great progress in regard to external funding, diversification of the faculty, incorporation of issues of Hawaiian culture into the curriculum, and implementation of the two new doctoral programs. Also worthy of commendation are major additions to the physical infrastructure of the campus and to the senior administrative leadership. In addition to its commendations, the visiting team noted some significant areas of concern, most especially in regard to governance and decision making and the Hawaiian doctorate. The Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the Special Visit team and urged UH Hilo to give them full consideration. In addition, the Commission highlighted several areas for the institution to address. The first two issues highlighted below were of the greatest concern to the Commission and must be addressed immediately, and will be reviewed at the time of the next Special visit. While further progress is expected on the other issues, they will be reviewed in the course of preparations for the next set of CPR and EER visits.

Institutional Governance and Decision Making. The University's own Special Visit Report noted continuing problems associated with its two-tiered faculty governance system. These problems include conflicts between the University Congress and the School Senates regarding the authority of the Congress to pass university-wide policy, as well as conflicts between School Senates and School Deans over issues of academic and administrative authority. The team confirmed that the two-tiered system "continues to be duplicative" and "continues to create inconsistent guidance in the processes for effective decision making (CFR 3.8)." Roles and responsibilities are not adequately differentiated, and it is unclear who has oversight over issues of curriculum or university policies. Furthermore, the administration appears to have remained uninvolved, if not ineffective, in resolving this duplication, which raises concerns regarding compliance with CFRs 1.3 and 3.10.

The Commission finds the continuing inability to resolve these issues troubling and endorses the team recommendations that:

- There be a systematic method for the codification of University policies (CFR 3.8);
- Governance structures and responsibilities be formally resolved and codified in the Faculty Manual. (CFR 3.8 and 3.11) This would include implementing the recommendations that:
    - Purview over curricular review and approval move to the University Congress "to ensure appropriate university-wide input and to avoid redundancy in courses;"
    - The School Deans' roles be clarified so that there is a clearer correlation between their responsibilities and their authority in both academic and fiscal matters;

- The shared governance process be clarified in order to articulate the "difference between consultation with faculty to inform academic and administrative decisions compared to the [administration's] authority to make final decisions;
- The University administration play an appropriate role in ensuring that the governance structure, however delineated, supports effective decision making.

In sum, the Commission concurs with the team that "UH Hilo organizational structures and decision-making processes require a formalized and codified determination of the roles, responsibilities, and authority of the Cabinet, the Deans, the Faculty Congress, and the College Senates." As you are aware, the Commission, in its June 25, 2004 action letter, indicated that, unless these problems were resolved satisfactorily, the University "could be found out of compliance with Standard 3." Thus, given the number of times this issue has been raised without resolution in the past, as well as in the current visit, the Commission now finds UH Hilo out of compliance with Standard 3 of the WASC *Handbook of Accreditation*. All of the bulleted items delineated above must be addressed immediately in order to return the University to compliance.

Doctorate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Languages and Culture Revitalization. Since the previous team visit to UH Hilo and the previous Commission action letter, there has been a major change at the University reflected in a move to doctoral-level education. The WASC Substantive Change Committee approved a doctorate in Pharmacy and one in Hawaiian and Indigenous Languages and Culture Revitalization, both of which are now in place.

While the Pharmacy doctorate appears to be functioning well, the new doctorate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Languages and Culture Revitalization is the subject of serious concern. Four of the five doctoral students in the program also hold professorial rank in the program's College. This led the team to note "obvious conflict of interest issues regarding the objectivity in evaluating the work of students who are also colleagues (CFR 1.8)." Additionally, there appears to be no published curriculum for the doctoral program. "Administrators could not explain the difference between the MA program and the PhD program with regard to course requirements." Since HILCR is its own College, "the people who review and approve the curriculum are the same people who write the curriculum, thus precluding objective oversight." Additionally, "faculty capacity and stability is a critical issue," with only three permanent faculty members complementing the four doctoral students/professors mentioned above.

In your May 23rd response, you challenged the lack of differentiation between the MA and the PhD. You also indicated that additional faculty members in linguistics have been hired. Regarding the matter of University curricular oversight, you indicated that the campus is "now seeking to establish a university-wide protocol for curricular development and oversight for all degree programs at all levels."

Notwithstanding your May 23rd response, and the comments provided by both you and your colleagues at the panel discussion itself, the Commission continues to have serious concerns about the quality and integrity of the HILCR doctorate. The Commission holds institutions to special responsibilities for ensuring the quality of doctoral programs, especially for the PhD. As a PhD program in an important new subject area, the highest standards of quality and integrity

are required in order to ensure program credibility and viability. That the Substantive Change Committee reviewed and approved the plans for the degree does not negate the findings of the Special Visit team's review of the program in operation. The program, and the University's oversight of it, do not presently meet the expectations of CFRs 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.7. In addition, the fact that HILCR is its own college heightens the Commission's concerns regarding institutional governance and decision making discussed earlier.

The Commission thus calls for immediate attention to:

- Clarifying admissions requirements for the PhD;
- Delineating the curriculum of the PhD vis-à-vis that of the MA and publishing a curriculum showing the differentiation between the two;
- Assessing student learning for both the master's and the doctorate;
- Developing a conflict of interest policy covering individuals serving simultaneously as students and faculty;
- Building faculty capacity.

As has been indicated above in regard to both institutional governance and decision making, and the HILCR doctorate, the Commission has found that the University is out of compliance with a number of Criteria for Review. However, given the institution's commitment to address these problems, the University will be given one more opportunity to resolve them, noting that some of the problems have been raised before by previous teams and Commission actions. In regard to these two issues, it will be up to the University to demonstrate immediately that it has moved beyond intention to actual implementation of the changes necessary. Otherwise, further findings of noncompliance will lead to a sanction.

Mission, Planning, and Institutional Resources. The Commission joins the team in commending the University for its progress in strategic planning. Among other positive developments, it acknowledged the establishment of a Long Range Budget Planning Committee, which has helped the campus to align strategic planning objectives with resource capabilities, and to create a more transparent planning and budgeting process. The team found this effort "noteworthy in that it is inclusive and allows the entire campus to become engaged in the budgetary process." It also applauded the Chancellor and the campus for their successful fundraising efforts and for the development of public/private partnerships that support the "academic core of the institution."

However, the team found that campus strategic planning needs to occur within the context of system planning priorities, and not only in relation to the university's unique position in the state, in order to be ultimately successful. Specifically, there appears to be some disagreement between the campus and the system regarding the proportion of students who are not Hawaii residents and whether UH Hilo should function within system guidelines. The team also found that while the system funding model "does negatively limit the growth potential of UH Hilo, ... it is not so restrictive that the current operations of the university cannot be met with the allocated resources." The Commission concurs with the team's recommendation that the University establish an Enrollment Committee to develop a growth plan for the campus and to

"work toward reconciling the fundamental differences in philosophy between the Hilo campus and the system office with regard to enrollment budgeting."

The Commission noted that the matter of the appropriate level of funding for UH Hilo has been raised in both current and previous visiting team reports. The position of the Commission is that the size of the campus student body, the types of students making up that student body, and the formulas used to budget for the student body are matters for the University and the UH system — and not for the Commission — to resolve. It is within the parameters set by the Regents, the system, and the campus itself that the University must plan, allocate resources, and ensure educational effectiveness.

Diversity. The visiting team found that the campus had made substantial progress in addressing the various diversity-related concerns identified in the 2004 Commission action letter. "Student learning appears to be enhanced by the infusion of Native Hawaiian ways of knowing into courses." Additionally, the revised General Education Program now includes a requirement for students to study the Native Hawaiian culture and ways of knowing. The Chancellor's Committee on the Diversification of the Faculty and the Staff has developed a set of concrete plans and actions in the important arena of faculty and staff recruitment. However, these plans and actions need to be finalized and implemented. Additionally, there needs to be a formal campus-wide plan regarding the infusion of diversity issues across the curriculum, and the inclusion of diversity as a priority in the University's long-range strategic planning efforts.

Educational Effectiveness. According to the campus Special Visit Report, and as noted by the visiting team, there has been "only modest progress in involving faculty in student learning assessment over the past four years." While all departments have student learning outcomes, "most are not assessing the outcomes nor is there a requirement to include the outcomes on syllabi and there is no campus system for collecting and reviewing the syllabi." (CFR 2.4, 2.6) Additionally, the team found that most departments have not begun to actually assess student learning, and, while the program review policy that was passed in 2006 has been fully implemented, the policy itself is "unusual in that the review process does not involve oversight from faculty " outside of the department being reviewed. (CFR 4.8)

All of the above led the team to call for "strong visible support of student learning assessment at all levels" and campus education on the "value and purpose of assessment aside from compliance." The Commission agrees and concurs with the team that the program review policy "needs to include more faculty involvement in and oversight of the process and a greater degree of buy-in from the faculty on the assessment requirement in the policy." All departments must demonstrate that they have begun to actually assess student learning and to review and improve their curricula in the light of those assessments. (CFR 2.7)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Special Visit team and continue the accreditation of the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

2. Schedule a Special Visit in fall 2009 to review the institution's compliance with the Standards of Accreditation and Criteria for Review in regard to institutional governance and decision making, and the Hawaiian doctorate.

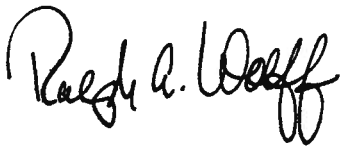
3. Reschedule the next Capacity and Preparatory Review for spring 2013 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for fall 2015.

These actions provide notice to the institution that it is out of compliance with CFRs 1.3, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.7, 3.8, 3.10, and 3.11, and is being given one final opportunity to return to compliance. If the issues discussed above are not addressed by the conclusion of the next Special Visit process, a sanction will be imposed, triggering the two-year rule as described in the *Handbook of Accreditation.*

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the institution's governing board in one week. It is the Commission's expectation that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in them. A copy of the letter will also be sent to President David McClain.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

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cc: Commission Chair
Board Chair
President McClain
ALO Komenaka
Members of the team
Richard Giardina