Recent WASC Reviews of UH Hilo

Action required: SPC members are asked to:

- Note recent feedback provided by WASC to UH Hilo and its relevance to strategic planning

1. Background

WASC (the Western Association of Schools and Colleges) is the accrediting institution of UH Hilo. WASC is one of six regional associations that accredit public and private schools, colleges, and universities in the United States. The university has accreditation from the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of WASC until June 2015, but plans and preparations for the next institutional review are already underway under the guidance of an Accreditation Steering Committee (ASC). The ASC was appointed in August 2010 by Chancellor Straney and is chaired by April K. Scazzola, Accreditation Liaison Officer and Interim Dean of the College of Continuing Education and Community Service. The ASC is charged with examining UH Hilo under the WASC standards.

Accredited institutions share two core commitments – to institutional capacity and to educational effectiveness. The WASC process begins by asking institutions to ground their efforts in these two commitments.

**Institutional capacity**

The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes.

**Educational effectiveness**

The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program level. The institution employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that ensure delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

The accreditation review process itself consists of three stages: the Institutional Proposal, the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) and the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER). The
institutional proposal is intended to define and organize how the institution will address Commission Standards through self-review. The CPR and EER are intentionally designed to be aligned and sequential, to enable the institution to engage in a staged, developmental process that leads beyond minimum compliance to significant improvement of both institutional capacity and educational effectiveness. For UH Hilo, the Institutional Proposal and Capacity and Preparatory Reports are due in Fall 2013, the Educational Effectiveness report in Spring 2015.

WASC has four standards that it expects institutions to meet:

Standard 1: Defining institutional purposes and ensuring educational objectives
Standard 2: Achieving educational objectives through core functions
Standard 3: Developing and applying resources and organizational structures to ensure sustainability
Standard 4: Creating an organization committed to learning and improvement

2. Outcomes from Recent WASC Reviews of UH Hilo

Since the last strategic plan was finalized, there has been an accreditation review of UH Hilo which involved two site visits – one for the Preparatory Review in March 2003 and the other for the Educational Effectiveness review in March 2004 – and two other special site visits, in March 2008 and October 2009. The Special Visit in March 2008 was to determine the extent to which UH Hilo had acted on recommendations from WASC following its reaccreditation in 2004. The March 2008 Special Visit highlighted several areas where UH Hilo was out of compliance with WASC standards so the visit in October 2009 was to give the university opportunity to reconcile those failings.

Please see Annexes I to IV for the original ‘action letters’ from WASC. Below is a summary of all WASC feedback which is intended to give the SPC a sense of the key areas highlighted, particularly where they relate to strategic planning.

Key Points raised from WASC Reviews Relevant to Strategic Planning

After its Preparatory Review of UH Hilo, WASC highlighted some issues which it wanted the university to address before the Educational Effectiveness Review. Four areas were identified and as summarized below.

Mission, Planning and Institutional Resources

- Further clarification of the university’s mission and its role within the University of Hawaii System is required to enable a clear link between planning and resources (WASC cited an increase in programs at UH Hilo without a corresponding increase in funding). WASC recommended that along with improving its role within the System, UH Hilo should strive to more systematically understand the impact of expanding enrollment on the overall University infrastructure, student services and staff workload (June 2004).
  - In particular, WASC recommended that the university continue to attract external funding and make certain that anticipated enrollment growth does not occur at the expense of currently enrolled students or already thriving programs by specifying institutional priorities.
(June 2008) Campus strategic planning needs to occur within the context of UH System planning priorities, and not only in relation to UH Hilo’s unique position within the state.

**Institutional Governance and Decision Making**

- In June 2008, WASC expressed serious concern over UH Hilo’s governance and decision making citing lack of clarity and differentiation in roles between the Cabinet (now the Council of Vice-Chancellor’s), Deans, Faculty Congress and College senates. Much has been done to improve this (led by a Task Force on Institutional Governance in 2009) and WASC acknowledged this in their return visit in October 2009. WASC however highlighted the need for:
  - resources to provide oversight of curriculum planning and development
  - appropriate administrative oversight of graduate education

WASC have stated that their focus at the next review will be on the implementation of the curriculum review and approval process (Curriculum Central).

**Enrollment Management and Educational Effectiveness**

- EMIT (the Enrollment Management Implementation Team) was set-up at UH Hilo following recommendation from WASC 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’ (quoted from WASC Action Letter, June 30 2008, Annex III). In their March 2010 Action Letter (see Annex IV), WASC commended the work of EMIT and encouraged the group to focus attention on the implementation of the newly-developed enrollment planning and management processes, as well as the alignment of recruitment and retention with the university’s strategic priorities and performance measures.

- (June 2003) WASC referenced that assessment and quality improvement should not just be seen as restricted to academic affairs. They encouraged UH Hilo to expand its improvement efforts to all aspects of the university by tying measures of effectiveness of student outcomes and other performance indicators to the strategic plan, annual planning and budgeting.

- WASC recommended that the university promote campus-wide engagement in the assessment of student learning (June 2004 and 2008). WASC called for strong visible support of student learning at all levels and campus education on the value and purpose of assessment aside from compliance (with WASC policies). By the time of UH Hilo’s next review, WASC stated that all departments must demonstrate that they have begun to assess student learning and review and improve curricula in light of those assessments.

**Diversity**

- (June 2003) WASC commended UH Hilo’s efforts in responding to its diverse student population, but noted that the university needed to undertake more work to diversify its faculty and staff populations, as well as diffusing throughout the curriculum the key learnings and insights that have made the Hawaiian program a worldwide example (June 2004). WASC stated that they expect both activities to be developed and for there 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 strategic planning efforts.