Executive Summary

‘What Really Matters at UHH?’
Survey Consultation Report

2010-2018 UHH Strategic Plan: Pre-planning

August 2010

For a copy of the full report please visit: www.hilo.hawaii.edu/strategicplan/preplanning

For further information or any queries please contact:
   Siân Millard
   UHH Strategic Planning Coordinator
   Tel: (808) 933 3297
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this survey consultation was to gain views on UH Hilo (UHH) from a broad range of stakeholders to help inform development of the 2010-2018 Strategic Plan. The survey was essentially a SWOT analysis, asking for views on the University’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, as well as key aspects it should prioritize over the coming years. 502 full and partial responses were received with engagement achieved from different groups across and, in some cases, beyond campus. Responses to each open question were analyzed by thematic analysis to identify common themes and issues.

What is evident from the findings is that themes relating to each question do not exist in isolation. Rather, they interrelate and in some cases are dependent on each other, representing the challenging complexities of an institution such as UHH. Different ‘faces’ of the same theme are identified under different questions. For instance, community engagement is highlighted as a strength of the University, but it is also highlighted as a weakness and an opportunity in terms of improving community partnerships.

Findings indicate three main categories of themes: academic standards and direction, internal functioning and operation, and external engagement and influences.

*Academic standards and direction* includes issues such as teaching quality, course evaluations, admission standards, graduate versus undergraduate education and support for non-traditional students.

*Internal functioning and operation* highlights issues relating to UHH’s identity, infrastructure (physical and technical), internal relationships and communication, strategic planning and crime and security.

*External engagement and influences* covers aspects such as UHH’s location, marketing and branding, community engagement, student recruitment, and partnership working with business.

Strengths of UHH centered around its unique location and the diverse cultural and environmental influences that impact positively on the University. This was evident in key academic strengths such as marine science and Hawaiian studies programs. The small size of University also affords relatively small class sizes which were identified as an important factor in developing strong student-faculty relationships and facilitating learning in a personal environment. However, students recommended that this unique aspect of UHH could be further built upon by improving teaching quality through taking more account of and acting upon student course evaluations.

Targeted marketing and branding activities were identified as necessary to better highlight UHH’s unique aspects and fully capitalize on its strengths. Improvement to the University’s infrastructure – e.g. housing, parking, building maintenance – was also noted as a key area requiring attention to enable the University to grow, where such growth would need to be appropriate with a focus on quality not quantity. To support all of these areas, respondents identified a general need to improve strategic planning across UHH to bring students, staff and faculty together to work towards a common vision and goals.

Weaknesses of UHH were wide ranging – from significant issues with the existing infrastructure, to criticisms of the current leadership and administration of the University. Poor physical and technical infrastructure was identified as hindering growth, negatively affecting UHH’s image, and impacting on the University ability to deliver high quality education. Low admission standards were generally viewed as a strong contributing factor to UHH’s low student retention rate, especially with regards to accepting underprepared students to the University. However, this view was not shared by all respondents with others saying that the University is one of access and therefore has an obligation to provide effective remedial support to those who require additional help. Poor academic rigor was
also raised and explored through intrinsically linked subthemes of teaching quality and course evaluations.

UHH was identified to have a poor reputation and identity crisis with a lack of unified vision or priorities and lack of school pride. In relation, there were varying views about the academic direction that UHH should take with some arguing that a lack of graduate programs was a key weakness, whereas others argued that development of graduate programs was detrimental to the undergraduate core.

There was widespread criticism of the University’s leadership and administration, particularly with regards to ineffective planning and decision making. Poor internal working relationships within and across campus colleges and units were also highlighted as a significant issue and contributing factor to low staff and faculty morale.

Limited distance learning opportunities and lack of day-care facilities on campus were criticized as making it difficult for some non-traditional students and students from the West-side of the Big Island, to attend UHH. Increased crime and safety concerns were also raised as issues by student respondents in particular.

Opportunities for UHH were wide-ranging. New leadership, through a new Chancellor, was identified as an important opportunity to re-energize the University and develop a shared vision for the future. This was also represented with regards to the majority of respondents recommending that UHH’s traditional undergraduate program be extended to include more targeted graduate programs in areas of specific need and expertise that take full advantage of the University’s unique location. This view was though not shared by all respondents with some highlighting that the University’s existing expansion into the provision of graduate education has come at the expense of the undergraduate core. Development of partnerships with organizations like local High Schools and Hawaii Community College were seen as key to better support UHH’s academic programs and student enrollment and retention. UHH’s proximity the China and Asia was also referenced in this regard with some respondents highlighting given UHH’s position in the Pacific it is an attractive place for international students to come study.

Indigenous culture and language revitalization was referenced by respondents as a growing global interest area and respondents noted that UHH is well placed to respond to and contribute to this interest area given its existing internationally recognized work in Hawaiian language and studies. Opportunities to make the campus environmentally sustainable and provide improved access to non-traditional students and students from the West-side of the Big Island through distance learning and outreach centers were also noted as important opportunities to take advantage of.

Threats to UHH primarily focused on inadequate funding and competition for limited resources with other universities and colleges within the UH System. This was particularly in relation to the impact on infrastructure developments, student recruitment and retention (if tuition fees have to be raised), attracting and retaining faculty and staff due to poor salaries, and ultimately being able to grow as a university. Respondents recommended that to deal with this problem prioritization of resources and activities is required, guided by clear goals and reasons, and alternative revenue streams should be proactively sought.

Other threats related to internal operational issues including the effect of continued ineffective leadership, acceptance of the status quo and unwillingness to change, and a failure to articulate an identity for the university.
Priorities identified for UHH effectively summarize the key issues concerning respondents. First and foremost was a request the UHH urgently seek to reevaluate its identity and vision for the future – without such the University would not be able to address many other of the issues already identified. Improving student success outcomes was highlighted along with focusing on academic excellence and academic program development to capitalize on existing key programs and develop new ones (particularly graduate programs) in areas of opportunity. The importance of working in partnership with the local community and local businesses was also identified as important to enhance the University’s role in supporting community needs. Activity development in these areas should though be done whilst seeking appropriate growth and ensuring that the campus has the infrastructure to support its goals and keep the campus safe and secure.

As can sometimes be the case with surveys of this nature, there is a tendency for respondents to focus on the weaknesses and challenges in an effort to highlight areas that require improvement. It doing so, the positives can sometimes be lost within a myriad of constructive criticism and the challenges ahead can be left looking daunting and unobtainable. However, as respondents were keen to point out under further comments, UHH has enormous potential and dedicated staff, faculty and students who have the skills and desire to support necessary change and make it happen.

This report therefore seeks to reflect the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and priorities of UHH as put forward by its key stakeholders and constituencies. What is set out highlights the significant challenges facing the university as it prepares to enter a new phase under new leadership. It is evident is that the critical issue of the University’s identity and who it serves needs to be resolved before many of the other issues raised can begin to be addressed. Whilst some of those issues may at times make uncomfortable reading, they represent an honest and open constructive criticism of the University from the people who know it most intimately – its students, faculty, staff, alumni and others. Their feedback, as summarised in this report, will help UHH identify ways to move forward in a unified, effective and successful way.

This task will fall to the UHH Strategic Planning Committee. This Committee (to be formed in fall 2010) will consider this report and other evidence gathered during this ‘pre-planning phase’ to review and redefine the University’s mission, vision, priorities and goals. They will seek to attach appropriate strategies and relevant measurable objectives, to ensure all at UHH knows the steps they need to take to help the University reach its goals. This will be done in collaboration and consultation with UHH’s stakeholder communities so that this planning process and its outcomes will be clear, transparent and owned by all. Publication of a Strategic Plan/Framework document (target date May 2011) will reflect the outcomes of that process, and set the agenda for implementation and monitoring through strategic leadership and management.