

[Note: This is a scanned version of the original WASC action letter. To see the actual letter or photocopy, including the signature of WASC Executive Director Ralph Wolff, please contact the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UH Hilo, 808-974-7707.]

June 30, 2003

Rose Y. Tseng
Chancellor
University of Hawaii, Hilo
200 West Kawili Street
Hilo, Hi 96720-4091

Dear Chancellor Tseng:

At its meeting on June 19-20, 2003, the Commission considered the report of the team that conducted the Preparatory Review visit to the University of Hawaii, Hilo on March 19-21, 2003. The Commission also had access to the Institutional Proposal and Institutional Presentation prepared by the University for the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with you as part of the Panel's deliberation. Your comments were very helpful.

The Commission acknowledged that the university had originally completed all work in preparation for a review under the *1998 Handbook* but, in 2001, at the request of the new System administration, postponed its review to 2003 in order to have its review occur simultaneously with the other senior-level campuses and to have the campus evaluated under the *2001 Handbook*. To its credit, the University used the postponement to implement recommendations resulting from preparations for the earlier review and to enhance its level of preparedness for the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews.

The institutional Presentation was well aligned with the Institutional Proposal, and the University provided useful and relevant evidence to support its Reflective Essays. The Reflective Essays presented the state of the University effectively in a variety of areas and included topics where additional work was needed to address the underlying values and intent of the Standards of Accreditation.

The team found that the University has taken previous Commission concerns and recommendations seriously and has achieved substantial progress in a number of areas. Some important areas remain to be addressed, however, as reflected in the team report. *At* this stage of the review process, the team made a number of recommendations that the Commission endorses. While the Commission will take its final accrediting action following the Educational Effectiveness Review, the purpose of this letter is to identify issues arising from the Preparatory Review that the Commission wishes to highlight and have the University address by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review. The University is urged to address other longer-term issues raised in the team report as well. In this regard, the Commission highlighted the following issues:

Mission, Planning, and Institutional Resources. Since the last visit University constituencies are much more involved and aware of the University's budgeting and planning processes because of efforts to make the processes more transparent. Planning for the future, however, is made much more difficult without further clarification of the University's mission and its role in

the University of Hawaii System and without a much clearer and more transparent process at the system level specifying how financial allocations are being made, and *will* be made in the future. There is an important need for budget management and accountability, as well as for responsible future planning. As reported by the team, the University has increased its enrollment and programs without a corresponding increase in funding or a clear UH System allocation plan or rationale.

The team wrote:

Without a clearly defined and predictable process, UR Hilo cannot continue to accommodate enrollment growth without jeopardizing its base infrastructure both in personnel, normal operating expenses and in maintenance of its facilities and groups. . . The core budget of UH Hilo has been eroded due to a lack of support for enrollment growth, compensation increases and new space.

Response to this concern will need to occur at both the System and campus levels. The System's and University's strategic planning processes, both recently completed, will need to be followed up with a set of priorities for development among and within campuses, and must be supported by an accompanying financial plan. This will provide the basis for the University to develop realistic planning priorities and objectives.

Institutional Governance and Organizational Structures. The University responded to previous Commission and team concerns about its governance structure by establishing the Faculty Congress, composed of representatives from each College. The Congress has played a significant role in the development of the University's Strategic Plan and in the preparation of the Preparatory Review Report Still, the team noted that the University's overall governance is hampered by two factors: the continued existence of faculty senates and lingering problems with how the University itself is organized.

The team determined that, with the existence of the newly formed Faculty Congress, the faculty senates for each college perform an unnecessary and redundant function by acting on policies that warrant institution-wide review prior to enactment. The team also observed that, with 85 percent of the University's faculty in a single college, the University's governance and organizational structure and processes are dominated by that college. Indeed, over the past 10 years, the University has considered a variety of ways to balance its administrative and governance structures.

Such an arrangement inevitably creates tension between the roles of Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the college dean. The dean's span of control is nearly as great as that of the Vice Chancellor's.

The team recommended that the University settle on a strategy to address these organizational concerns and proceed with eliminating the senates and restructuring academic affairs. In light of the longstanding nature of the Commission's concerns and the evident effect that the inability to resolve these arrangements is having, there is a need for action as soon as possible. Progress has been made but further steps are needed to bring this issue to a more complete resolution.

Institutional and Educational Effectiveness. The University has also made progress in areas related to institutional and educational effectiveness. As part of its strategic planning initiative, it

developed quality performance indicators to measure success with the “broad input from the faculty, staff, students, and the Hilo community.” An indication of the success of the newly established Office of Institutional Research is the effectiveness of the student services division in reducing student attrition by monitoring and acting on data provided by the Office of Institutional Research in regard to student satisfaction. These efforts need to be continued in order to improve both retention and graduation rates.

In regard to Educational Effectiveness, the team found that the University had made “great strides” in moving toward the vision of becoming a learning organization. Cited by the team were the formation of assessment and general education committees, the establishment of policies for assessment and academic program review, the conduct of faculty assessment workshops, and the provision of coaching and consulting services by the Institutional Research Director. At the same time the team found that assessment and quality improvement were seen by the University at large as being restricted to Academic Affairs. The University will need to expand its improvement efforts to all aspects of the University. This can be done by tying not only measurement of effectiveness to student outcomes, but also performance indicators to the Strategic Plan and the annual planning, budget, and evaluation cycle.

Diversity. The team also noted that the University has taken a number of steps to respond to its very diverse student population.. One of these is faculty development efforts to heighten faculty understanding of cross-cultural differences in learning styles and the need for different teaching styles. Additionally, cross-disciplinary courses and programs have been developed in ways that are sensitive to the Hawaiian student. The student affairs program, too, works within the cultural contexts of the University’s students. Particularly commendable is the program’s great success responding to the “40 little things” that go into the students’ experience.

Less success, however, has been experienced with diversifying the faculty. While the Commission recognized the University’s general commitment to diversity, it was concerned that the University has not yet developed a plan for improving the diversity of the faculty and staff. Such a plan needs to be developed and integrated into the University’s more general strategic plan and planning process.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Preparatory Review Report and continue the accreditation of the University of Hawaii at Hilo.
2. Proceed with the Educational Effectiveness Review on March 24-26, 2004.
3. Request that the University’s response to these issues be included in the Educational Effectiveness Report.

In accordance with Commission policy, we request that you send a copy of this letter to President Evan Dobbelle.

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

Sincerely,

Ralph Wolff
Executive Director

RW/brn

Cc: James Appleton
Christopher D. Lu
Members of the team
Gregory M. Scott