



July 6, 2007

David McClain
President
University of Hawaii
2444 Dole Street
Honolulu, HI 96822

Dear President McClain:

At its meeting on June 20-22, 2007, the Commission considered the report of the team that conducted the Special Visit to the University of Hawaii System Office on March 19-20, 2007. In addition to the team report, the Commission also had access to the Special Visit report prepared by the University in preparation for the visit.

The March 2007 visit culminates a series of visits and reports that began at the request of the University in 2002. These visits have proven to be very useful for both the University and the Commission. They have enabled the Commission to assess the reorganization of the System and the Office of the President, to review strategic planning efforts, to address funding issues and priorities, and to support the development of more effective relations between the Board of Regents and the President. In addition, these visits have enabled more effective reviews of each of the campuses. As stated by the team:

Over the course of the last five years the WASC Commission has interacted with the University of Hawaii System (and its campuses) in a special effort to evaluate and guide the development of a major System reorganization. This process has clearly helped both the State of Hawaii and WASC to better assure that the governance structure of the University of Hawai'i System has both appropriate governance structures and the institutional integrity to fulfill its roles as the provider of public higher education in the State.

The Special Visit was charged to assess whether continuing progress was being made in the following areas: Board of Regents/President relations; relations with the legislature and Governor; organization of the System Office and relations with the campuses; strategic planning; financial/budget accountability; and the state of Native Hawaiian affairs. The team found progress continuing on all issues, and the general state of each of these issues

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seems to be much improved from 2002. The Board of Regents and the University is to be congratulated on the extent of this progress, and the clear direction that you and the Board have provided to the University.

In accepting the Special Visit report, the Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the team. In addition, the Commission highlighted several issues that warrant further attention in the years ahead:

Board of Regents Composition and Operational Effectiveness. As found by this and the last Special Visit team, the Board of Regents has significantly improved its functioning and operational effectiveness, and its relations with the President. New legislation is now in effect which will expand the size of the Board and change the process for nominating members of the Board of Regents. Over the coming several years, there is likely to be significant turnover in the composition of the Board. The Commission will await the outcome of all these changes and assess their impact at the time of its next review. As stated by the team:

It will be imperative that the Board of Regents not be viewed as a partisan Board. The primary function of the Board of Regents is to provide governance and advocacy of the entire University of Hawaii System. To be successful in this mission, the Board of Regents must be able to work with all parties and elected officials. The team strongly recommends that the State Legislature, Governor and now the new Board of Regents candidate advisory council implement the new Board of Regents selection process with this foremost in mind.

In light of the significant progress made by the Board in improving its productivity and effectiveness, the Commission is concerned that this progress continue and not be attenuated by the new nominating process or the new Board membership. At the time of the next review, the Commission will want to evaluate the functioning of the Board and assess whether it has been able to maintain and improve its operational effectiveness in support of the entire University.

Relations with the Legislature. The team found that relations with the Legislature have improved. At the same time, since the last review, there have been attempts by individual members of the Legislature to interfere with internal personnel appointments and assignments. The team stated: “Such efforts [at interference] are a source of continuing concern and, to the extent they arise, the UHS is not able to maintain the autonomy/integrity required by WASC Standards. The Team recommends that State Officers and Legislators recognize the importance of maintaining personnel decisions within the proper authority of the UHS. Failure to do so would be the basis of findings on noncompliance with WASC Standards.”

The Commission fully concurs with this statement and will wish to assess Board functioning at the time of the next visit. In the interim, the Commission stands ready to address any violations of this core principle.

Enrollment management and retention across the UH System. As part of the University’s strategic planning process, enrollment goals are being set for each campus. In addition, the

University has entered into a voluntary agreement sponsored through the National Association of System Heads (NASH) to significantly increase retention and degree-completion rates. These are important initiatives, and the Commission endorses these efforts. It will wish to see whether the University has met its goals and has been able to increase graduation rates, especially for underrepresented groups.

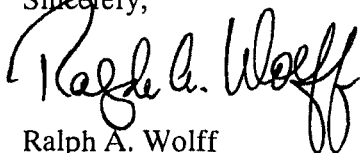
The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Special Visit team.
2. Commend the University for its participation in the System Office reviews and for the progress made in addressing issues cited above.
3. In light of the significant turnover on the Board of Regents in the coming year, request a meeting with the Board of Regents in fall 2009 to discuss Commission Standards and processes.
4. Request a visit to the University of Hawaii System Office in fall 2012 to assess continuing progress in the areas identified in this letter and the team report, and to provide a foundation for the accreditation of the three campuses accredited by the Senior College Commission.

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.

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

RW/aa

cc: John D. Welty
Board Chair
Linda K. Johnsrud
Members of the team