14 April 2015

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University of Hawaii
Board of Regents
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To the Administrative Board of the University of Hawaii:

This TESTIMONY is in regards to the University of Hawaii (UH); the Management of Mauna Kea; the Mauna Kea Science Reserve, specifically the development of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) at Kūkahau‘ula and its Mid-Level Facility at Hale Pōhaku; and the State of Hawaii’s 2014 Follow-Up Audit of the Management of Mauna Kea and the Mauna Kea Science Reserve.

The 2014 Follow-Up Audit found that the UH and the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) improved their management and stewardship efforts for UH leased lands on the summit of Mauna Kea since their 2005 State Audit. However, the Follow-Up Audit also found that as of August 2014, UH has not adopted administrative rules even though the Office of Mauna Kea Management (OMKM) had five years to work with UH and DLNR to do so.

In April 2013, the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) denied an appeal to permit TMT construction, and in September 2013 Taber crews continued drilling at the TMT jobsite. Environmental samplings from Taber drilling were not provided in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) proposed by UH Hilo on May 8th, 2010, nor has the EIS been updated since construction began in 2013. The Final EIS was strategically written to supplement geological details with economic benefits, which is not the purpose of evaluating the TMT’s environmental affects. Although there are plans in the EIS to respect the needs of the host culture and to provide the host community with economic opportunities that would otherwise not exist, there are no solid facts to support its claim that environmental impacts of the TMT would be insignificant. The lengthy description of decommissioning, along with procedures to restore original land structures and native species upon contractual expiration, contradicts the claim that environmental impacts would not be significant.

Significance defers between the scientific community and the host culture, so it would be more admirable if the University would support its statements with relevant facts rather than rhetoric and bribery. The UH, the OMKM, and the TMT have not been completely transparent with the public about construction efforts. As a result, the general public is unclear on what exactly is happening on their mountain.

The TMT is a necessary instrument for human kind. Preparing the scientific community and its host culture to alter their beliefs is equally important. Whether it is it built now, next month, or in twenty years, and whether it is built on our mountain or on someone else’s, the TMT, or something like it, will be built. All factions are not ready for the TMT to be built on Mauna Kea because we are not
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ready to alter our worldviews. We can start by acknowledging that all cultures are scientific cultures, and that each culture has distinct scientific methods. The question, then, should not be how to make our differing cultures co-exist, but how to make our conflicting scientific methods work together.

The proposed $1 million dollar contribution to The Hawaii Island New Knowledge Fund (THINK) is not enough to facilitate educational progress across the island. Critical studies in history, culture, and the arts should also be supported by THINK because designing futuristic technology and disseminating scientific knowledge will require as much creative ability as it will technical skill. Financial support for science and math only serves the interests of the TMT. Supporting content area integration will sustain the audio, visual, and literary arts that have made, and will continue to make, astronomical technology relevant to any culture.

The TMT permit requires its staff to participate in annual cultural education. When I recently participated in a night tour at Hale Pōhaku, the astronomers who lodge there did not mention a single Hawaiian name for any of the constellations that their telescopes were fixed on for the public to see. I was embarrassed for them that they were unable to share traditional Hawaiian knowledge on top of a Hawaiian mountain. What measures have been taken by the TMT non-profit organization to ensure that its members and staff have been assessed in hands-on cultural training since the BLNR approved their project in 2013? Construction should not be allowed to progress because the UH has not provided the public with a formal assessment showing that the TMT has met the requirements of its Conservation Use Permit over the past two years.

As the Administrative Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii, please consider halting further construction of the TMT until you are able to successfully administer your subordinates, and until the UH, together with the DLNR, are able to establish a formal set of administrative rules to manage Mauna Kea followed by a quantitative and qualitative assessments of those rules. Please do not allow the development of any new establishments on public land until you can show the public that you are capable of responsibly managing the existing establishments on your leased science reserve.

According to the 2014 Follow-Up Audit, it is yet to be determined if funding that has been received by Mauna Kea Management for commercial usage since 2007 must be returned because of unauthorized permits. Could such an assessment have been completed in seven months? If so, where are the findings? How can the UH peacefully co-exist with its host culture if they have not earned our trust? As a member of the indigenous host culture and the UHCC system, I do not wish to be bought, bribed, or entertained by cultural rhetoric. I wish for us to prove that UH is an academic institution worthy of international recognition and sacred site usage, not because of our physical location and approved paper work, but because of our actions.

Sincerely,
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