Dear UH ‘Ohana,

As we approach the holiday season I wanted to take the time to thank you for your support and patience as we continue to process all the confusion of the past few months.

Despite this difficult period, many positive things have happened. UH’s strategic outcomes and performance measures from 2008 to 2015, and the metrics we developed to assess our progress, were reported to the Board of Regents. See overall progress at http://www.hawaii.edu/ovppp/uhplan/SOPM.pdf and individual campus progress at http://www.hawaii.edu/hawaiigradinitiative/presentations-2/.

In short, we have 10,000 more students than we did in 2005, before the economic recession. More of our students are graduating and the participation of underserved groups, especially Native Hawaiians, is at an all time high. We have reformed how we handle the course integration within the system and are gaining national recognition for our leadership in both transfer and completion of degrees. Our “15 to Finish” campaign will be prominently featured at the Complete College America annual meeting in New Orleans in mid-December. Our faculty and our administration, along with many staff, deserve our recognition for the efforts that have been made.

In addition, there is increased recognition of the critical role UH plays in the state’s recovery from the recession. When state funds were cut by $79 million, we put our shoulders to the wheel and sought funding elsewhere. We continue to do exceptionally well at bringing in extramural agency funding. Last year the university brought in $489 million in extramural funding, contributing to our ranking in the top 10 percent of all colleges and universities nationwide. In specialized areas such as natural sciences, UH ranks in the top 2 percent! In addition to enhancing UH’s international reputation, this activity generates many thousands of well paying jobs and offers our advanced students access to equipment, facilities and research opportunity that could never be provided solely by Hawai‘i state support.
To thrive in the 21st century, Hawai‘i’s education and research enterprise must be connected to statewide, national and global information and communication networks. UH successfully competed for over $46 million in federal funding to interconnect UH education and research sites, as well as public schools and public libraries on all islands, using direct fiber optic links. The initial connections are providing world-class connectivity at gigabit speeds now, and will be expandable to even greater capacity at minimal cost as needs inevitably grow in the future. Similarly, we competed for workforce development funding in a collaboration with the Hawai‘i Department of Labor, the private sector and other state agencies to bring the largest workforce development grant in the nation to Hawai‘i. Think about that, one of the smallest states and yet the largest grant in the nation. Following this success, UH received a second “C3T” grant that will support and continue this important work of providing trained workers for the energy, new agriculture and health fields.

What this says very clearly is that your university is a highly competent one, with talented individuals who work hard, bring opportunity to Hawai‘i and do not get discouraged when times are tough. I am so very proud to work in such an environment.

We also have been able to build for the future by moving our projects along, with several long awaited construction projects completed, near completion or underway. These are projects that will change the lives of our researchers and students. For example, the new University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu campus will make a college education that once seemed out of reach truly feasible for many in that area. The new cancer center in Kaka‘ako was completed ahead of schedule and under budget, enabling us to add an expansion “shell” wing for future labs. The state-of-the-art research building is scheduled to formally open in February and cancer researchers are already moving in. I also invite you to visit the lovely new learning commons at Windward Community College, the Center for Microbial Oceanography Research and Education building at UH Mānoa awarded a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum rating, the soon to be completed science building at Maui College, and a new education and innovation instructional facility at Leeward Community College. Almost every campus has something new or renovated to share. The new campus center at UH Mānoa and the renovated “awful to awesome” dormitories make campus life a whole new experience for their students.

We are also proud of the work going on at Hilo in addressing the future economic and educational needs of the Big Island community and beyond. UH Hilo is a partner with key community and government stakeholders supporting a new undergraduate certif-
icate in agriculture, “Veterans to Farmer”. UH Hilo and Hawai‘i Community College are developing island-wide and statewide pathways to facilitate seamless transfer into UH Hilo in agriculture, Hawaiian studies, marine science, nursing, and psychology. And the College of Pharmacy has begun a grant-funded program called Pharm2Pharm designed to reduce medication-related hospitalizations and emergency room visits by establishing teamwork between hospital and community pharmacists on the islands of Hawai‘i, Maui and Kaua‘i.

These accomplishments are reflected in our growing national and international reputations. In recent rankings, individual schools such as the law, business and medical schools have been recognized for their excellence. Our extramural success has us ranked among the best of the U.S. public research universities and our role in the execution of the APEC meeting was notable.

As it turned out our accreditors also think we have done a remarkable job. In the summary shared with us at their recent exit interview, the WASC committee commended UH for improving retention and graduation rates, was impressed with its “financial planning and careful attention to finances” during the economic downturn, and saluted our leadership team for keeping in mind the “long view rather than short term matters” as we make progress on our initiatives; high praise from this organization so critical to our future.

So, I want you to be proud of our university. We have had a recent so-called stumble. I am very sorry. The events surrounding the loss of funds from a failed concert in the athletic department of our flagship campus must not be allowed to overshadow our accomplishments. The mistakes of a few should not outweigh the hard work and success of the many. Hopefully, this sad episode is now pau.

The report of the Regent’s Advisory Task Force provides an excellent review of what happened and makes recommendations that we in several cases have already implemented and we are in the process of doing more. Any institution can make itself better with constant review and we are planning to do so. I have noted in the past that one of my longer term goals was to make us one of the best performing systems of higher education in the country and I believe we are making steady and serious progress toward that goal.

As we face a new calendar year, let us rededicate ourselves to our strategic and long term goals, let us remember that education is the path to enlightenment, state, national and personal security. Above all let us seize this new year with vigor and enthusiasm.

CARPE ANNUM!!

Mahalo nui loa for your support, understanding and dedication.