July 1, 2003

Peter Englert
Chancellor
University of Hawaii, Manoa
2500 Campus Road
Honolulu, HI 96822

Dear Chancellor Englert:

At its meeting June 19-20, 2003 the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team which evaluated the University of Hawaii, Manoa on March 18-20, 2003. In addition to the report of the evaluation team, the Commission had available to it the Special Visit Presentation of the University, including the written report, supporting materials, and website.

The Special Visit was requested by the Commission in June 1999, following a comprehensive visit in spring 1999. It was to focus on campus progress in addressing Commission concerns regarding leadership and communication, planning and priority-setting, student and educational program quality, and assessment and the use of data.

The institutional report was impressive in its organization, depth, and content. In the report and through supporting documentation, the University demonstrated that it took the concerns of the Commission and the previous evaluation team seriously and that it engaged the University community extensively in developing and enacting responses. The organization of evidence around the new Standards of Accreditation was also a useful exercise that provided a substantive foundation for the Special Visit and an effective starting point for self-review under the new Standards, in preparation for the next comprehensive review of the University. The Commission hopes that this portfolio may be of value to the University in its own right in addition to supporting the accreditation process.

The University has undergone significant transition and improvement since the last comprehensive review. As reported by the evaluation team, “there appears to be significant operational and, indeed, cultural change since the 1999 WASC action.” In addition to affirming the accuracy and effectiveness of many of the University’s responsive actions since the last visit, the team confirmed the statement made in the University’s Report that:
Here is, however, one fundamental difference between our campus today and the way it was in 1999: our capacity to confront and manage change has increased greatly. This change at the Manoa campus has resulted from: 1) a new attitude; 2) new leadership; 3) organizational and institutional reform; and 4) a commitment to becoming a self-learning organization.

A new UH System and UHM campus organization has been created, new campus leadership has been installed, a campus strategic plan has been completed with extensive University community involvement, and campus-wide approaches to assessment of student learning have been initiated. These are significant accomplishments in a relatively short time, and the University community is to be commended for addressing Commission concerns with such energy, direction, and accomplishment.

As with any large, comprehensive University, many challenges remain. As stated by the team, "The paramount challenge for the institution will be sustaining the momentum it now has for confronting change in positive and healthy directions." The evaluation team made a number of recommendations for University attention, and the Commission endorses them. In addition, the Commission highlighted several areas for further institutional response:

Planning. The newly adopted Manoa strategic plan sets forth well-supported directions for the University. As with any strategic plan, it will need to be aligned and adjusted to address the directions set by the new campus leadership, by budgetary considerations, and by new opportunities. Even so, it represents a strong foundation, and the challenge before the University is to realize the potential of the plan and to build on the extensive engagement which led to its creation and adoption. The plan will also need to be aligned with emerging priorities developed through the System's strategic plan and budget priorities.

Leadership and Governance. The new campus and System administrative structure have given the Manoa campus the opportunity to forge its own leadership team, and a number of campus positions are to be filled. Searches are underway for a Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and a Vice Chancellor for Research. The organization of student affairs is being studied. As these positions are filled, it will be important for the roles and responsibilities of the senior and middle-level management of the campus to be effectively developed and aligned. The team stated: "Both entities must continue to define, and to define clearly for all stakeholders, the various roles and responsibilities of the System vs. the UHM leadership." In addition, as recommended by the team, appointing authority for internal appointments within the campus needs to be resolved to provide the campus with appropriate responsibility to develop its own lines of authority.

Financial Management and Resource Allocation. The University has been able to achieve such considerable progress while operating with ongoing limits on financial support received from State allocations. Research generation has significantly increased during this period, although the University needs to address whether it is appropriately identifying its actual overhead expenses to support such research. Of significant concern to the
Commission, however, is clarity regarding the amount of resources and rationale for their allocation from the System to each campus, including the Manoa campus. In turn, there is a need for greater understanding of the internal resource allocations within UHM. As stated by the team, "UHM should work toward the development of an appropriately transparent and timely budget process, which is defined by clearly understood policy and by alignment of resource allocation with campus strategic goals." Nor does it appear that there is any active internal campus committee working with the administration on budget development and resource allocation. The Commission sees this as an area for requiring immediate attention. Effective planning and resource allocation cannot occur without clarity about allocation decisions and the involvement of campus constituencies in designing allocation priorities.

Educational Effectiveness and the Assessment of Student Learning. Since the 1999 visit, the campus has laid a strong foundation for addressing issues of Educational Effectiveness under the new Commission Standards of Accreditation. Hallmarks of the general education program have been agreed upon. Efforts are underway to develop courses in alignment with them and to adopt assessment approaches appropriate to the area of learning. The Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs has strategically funded initiatives to build the assessment infrastructure and deepen campus understanding of the value and methodologies of assessment. Faculty involvement has been impressive and widespread. These efforts need to become more systemic and embedded within the campus culture and incorporated more effectively in departmental reviews and assessment of general education outcomes. The emerging "culture of evidence" is a positive development, and deliberate opportunities need to be created for dialogue within and across departments and schools about the meaning of the evidence collected and analyzed, with action plans developed to improve courses, pedagogy and, ultimately, student learning. Vitally important will be sustaining the priority given to these initiatives since 1999 while the campus develops its new leadership team and simultaneously enhances its research capabilities.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Special Visit team.


3. Request eight copies of a Progress Report on the issues raised in this letter and the major recommendations of the evaluation team to be submitted by March 1, 2005. Enclosed is a memorandum providing guidance on the format and content of a progress report.

The next scheduled review of the institution will occur under the Handbook of Accreditation, which involves significant new Standards and substantially different expectations for
Institutional Presentations. The Commission urges the University to review the Handbook and the Evidence Guide to assess how institutional evidence can be developed prior to the next accreditation review that will make the new process more effective and focused on Educational Effectiveness, especially in assessing student learning results.

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

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

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

RW/brm

Cc: James R. Appleton
    Karl E. Kim
    Members of the team

Enclosure