I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Ernest Wilson called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. on Thursday, October 7, 2021. The meeting was conducted virtually with regents participating from various locations.

Committee members in attendance: Chair Ernest Wilson; Vice-Chair Kelli Acopan; Regent Simeon Acoba; Regent Eugene Bal; and Regent William Haning.

Others in attendance: Board Chair Randy Moore; Regent Wayne Higaki; Regent Diane Paloma; Regent Robert Westerman (ex officio committee members); President David Lassner; Vice President (VP) for Community Colleges Erika Lacro; VP for Legal Affairs/University General Counsel Carrie Okinaga; VP for Research and Innovation Vassilis Syrmos; VP for Information Technology/Chief Information Officer Garret Yoshimi; VP for Budget and Finance/Chief Financial Officer Kalbert Young; UH Mānoa (UHM) Provost Michael Bruno; UH Hilo (UHH) Chancellor Bonnie Irwin; UH West Oʻahu (UHWO) Chancellor Maenette Benham; UH Maui College (UHMC) Chancellor Lui Hokoana; Executive Administrator and Secretary of the Board of Regents (Board Secretary) Kendra Oishi; and others as noted.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Vice-Chair Acopan moved to approve the minutes of the June 2, 2021, committee meeting, seconded by Regent Bal, and the motion carried, with all members present voting in the affirmative.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Board Secretary Oishi announced that the Board Office did not receive any written testimony and that no individuals signed up to provide oral testimony.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS

A. Update on Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Accreditation
1. Overview of Accreditation, Roles and Responsibilities of a Board, and Considerations for Accreditation within a University System

President Lassner provided a brief background of the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), which is an institutional accrediting agency that accredits four of the university’s campuses including UHM, UHH, UHWO, and UH Maui College, and noted that the other six campuses of the university system are accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) and recently underwent their accreditation review and evaluation. He introduced Jamienne Studley, President of WSCUC, who would be providing an overview of accreditation and WSCUC’s accreditation processes.

Ms. Studley began by addressing the context under which institutional accreditation takes place noting that, despite the incredible diversity of institutions of higher education (IHE) across the United States with respect to matters such as educational mission, organizational structure, financial resources, and populations served, each institution remains responsible for ensuring that its core mission is met. WSCUC assists IHEs in achieving these goals through an accreditation process that aids institutions in developing and sustaining effective educational programs and assures the educational community, the general public, and other organizations that an accredited institution has met high standards of quality and effectiveness. It was noted that the higher education system in the United States is unlike other systems across the globe in that determining whether an IHE has met an acceptable level of quality is not a function of a centralized government agency but rather is a function carried out by federally-recognized, private educational associations of regional or national scope, such as WASC and WASCUC, that develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met. Accreditation of IHEs also involves federal and state government agencies that are responsible for ensuring that IHEs meet federal and state financial, consumer protection, and educational requirements.

Ms. Studley reviewed the broad standards used by WSCUC in reviewing and evaluating IHEs, noting the breadth of these standards, as well as the various elements of the WSCUC accreditation process. She stressed that WSCUC accredits institutions rather than individual programs and places an emphasis on institutional structures, governance, processes, and resources.

The changing landscape of accreditation, as well as the provision of post-secondary education in general, was discussed by Ms. Studley who stated that the focus of accreditors, IHEs, reviewers, and the general public is shifting from inputs and process to conversations addressing actions and results with greater emphasis being placed on outcomes achieved relative to investments made in higher education. Other changes occurring in accreditation and the provision of higher education included accreditors shifting from a regional to a national, and in some cases international, scope of accreditation; the evolution of individual IHEs into organizations that are more system-driven; and the development of new education providers, relationships, and business arrangements. She also reviewed current realities and challenges facing IHEs, as well as those that they are anticipated to face in the future and actions being taken by
WSCUC to help drive conversations about these topics and assist IHEs in meeting these new demands and expectations.

Stating that the University of Hawai‘i is a state university funded in large part by legislative appropriations and that tensions sometimes arise when attempts are made to invoke autonomy with respect to governance and operations, Board Chair Moore asked how these situations are addressed in other jurisdictions. Ms. Studley replied that WASC and WSCUC are focused on reviewing and evaluating the quality of IHEs and their ability to achieve expected outcomes in an effective manner. She stated that WASC and WSCUC expect individual institutions to have the governance capacity, thoughtfulness, and institutional leadership to navigate this tension and address these types of scenarios.

Board Chair Moore opined that there are two general perspectives on the purpose of higher education. One school of thought is that higher education exists to improve the capacity of individuals to maximize their utility and personal benefit for the benefit of society as a whole. The other notion is that IHEs exist to train a future workforce. This dichotomy of beliefs can lead to tensions with regard to the value of higher education in general. Ms. Studley concurred with this assessment stating that some of these conflicts can be addressed through a comprehensive and thoughtful evaluation of higher education that is conducted in the context of a long-term horizon which can provide university officials, governing boards, and public policy makers with concrete data on the values of a post-secondary education.

Regent Haning inquired about the distinction between WASC and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Ms. Studley explained that WASC is an accrediting organization that determines whether an IHE meets a particular set of educational and governance standards. WICHE is an organization whose purpose is to advance the collective interests of IHEs in the western United States. President Lassner added that WICHE is one of four regional compacts of states that exist throughout the country that advances the interests of IHEs within their respective region.

Citing comments made that WSCUC accredits institutions as a whole, Regent Acoba questioned the rationale behind allowing individual institutions to utilize a thematic process as an alternative pathway toward reaffirmation; inquired as to whether evaluations have been conducted on the efficacy, accuracy, and feasibility of using this process to accredit an institution; and asked if this process fulfilled requirements established under the federal Higher Education Act (HEA) with regard to accreditation. Ms. Studley replied that the thematic pathway for review was developed to simplify the reaffirmation process for institutions with a history of successful affirmation and strong core capacities. The thematic process allows institutions to achieve reaffirmation through focusing on themes of the institution’s choosing which then allows WSCUC to implement its accreditation process in a more concentrated manner. She stated that the thematic pathway for accreditation is currently being reviewed and evaluated as the first cohort of schools using this process was just approved last year. She also stated
that WSCUC believes that this process satisfies the broad statutory requirements of HEA.

2. Campus Updates

Provost Bruno, Chancellor Irwin, Chancellor Benham, and Chancellor Hokoana provided detailed updates on the progress of accreditation for their respective campus. Each reviewed their accreditation schedules noting that several off-site visits have already occurred and that on-site visits are scheduled in early 2022; the processes used to prepare for reaffirmation; issues, recommendations, and commendations noted in previous accreditation reports; steps that were taken, as well as actions that continue to be implemented, to address the noted issues and recommendations; and key issues, challenges, and areas of continued concern facing each campus.

Provost Bruno noted that UHM was selected to apply for reaffirmation using WSCUC’s newly implemented thematic process. He reviewed the three themes chosen by UHM which included becoming a Native Hawaiian place of learning; transformational student success; and academic innovation and engaged learning stating that they were in direct correlation with recommendations made by WSCUC during its last review and evaluation in 2011. Provost Bruno also highlighted issues and goals pertaining to each of these themes, as well as actions undertaken to address these issues and goals, and noted several accomplishments already achieved by UHM including the creation of the Native Hawaiian Place of Learning Advancement Office, the use of Native Hawaiian values in reviewing campus initiatives, increased graduation and retention rates, and the reimagination of disciplinary studies.

Regent Acoba requested clarification on the search advocacy program initiated by UHM to increase the diversity of faculty, as well as executive and managerial personnel, particularly with regard to the selection of search advisors and the efficacy of the program. Provost Bruno replied that the search advocacy program was started in 2020 to increase the diversity of university personnel and was modeled after a similar program at Oregon State University. Search advocates consist of volunteers that receive training from an academic personnel team from the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Excellence on methods of attaining the most diverse pool of applicants as possible for a particular position. Once training is completed, the search advocates are deployed to employment search committees outside the realm of their particular units. He noted that UHM requires a search advocate to be used in every employment search conducted on campus and that the program has witnessed measurable success thus far.

Chancellor Irwin stated that previous accreditation reviews have found issues with UHH including with the number of interim administrative staff employed and declines in enrollment both of which UHH is currently working to address. However, she noted that UHH also has a number of strengths including a strong sense of place and programmatic connections to community that is evidenced by its emphasis on high-impact practices in hands-on aina- and community-based learning. UHH has also increased efforts to become more transparent and engaging with the campus.
community through the use of public websites to provide easier access to campus information, including information on UHH’s finances.

Noting that additional information regarding the success and inclusivity of certain student subgroups at UHH was sought by the accreditation team, Regent Acoba requested Chancellor Irwin to expound upon this issue. Chancellor Irwin stated that the origins of this issue were revealed during extensive surveys conducted by UHH in preparation for its self-evaluation and are twofold. First, despite being a Hawaiian and Pacific Islander serving institution and the implementation of numerous programs to assist these students, equity gaps continue to be observed in student achievement among those subgroups. Second, the emphasis placed on assisting the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander subgroup has led other student subgroups with a smaller demographic to feel overlooked. UHH is working to address these issues through actions such as reviewing data to determine why equity gaps continue to be witnessed and the creation of affinity groups to increase student support on campus.

Chancellor Benham mentioned the importance of inclusivity in the reaffirmation process and noted the steps taken by UHWO to promote participation in this process. She stated that UHWO established a highly representative steering community to begin formulating its Institutional Report for Reaffirmation (IRR) in the fall of 2019. The steering committee then established nine component groups that were aligned with the various components of the IRR and were comprised of a broad range of the campus community including students and staff. Based upon discussions between and among the steering committee and component groups, as well as data and information collected as part of these discussion, a draft IRR report was produced and released in April 2021 for vetting by the broader campus community through eight campus-wide information sessions, town hall meetings, and surveys.

Chancellor Hokoana remarked that UHMC is an outlier in that, although it is accredited by WASC, it administratively reports to VP Lacro and the community college system, and provided background on how this occurred. He highlighted several components of UHMC’s IRR report including its determination to increase campus sustainability and noted that UHMC is engaging in preliminary work, including conducting an assessment of campus and community needs, to develop a new strategic plan to replace the strategic plan currently in place which is set to expire at the end of this year.

B. Committee Work Plan

Chair Wilson referenced the Committee Work Plan noting that it would be used as an outline of the work to be performed by the committee during the coming year and inquired if regents had any comments. No comments or questions were raised.

C. General Education (Gen Ed) Redesign Update

Debora Halbert, Associate Vice President (AVP) for Academic Strategy, provided a brief update on the work and progress of the Summer 2021 Gen Ed Institute (Summer Institute) that was tasked with examining and revamping the Gen Ed curriculum at the
university to address concerns with dated content and program structure and governance, as well as transfer and articulation challenges between campuses. She stated that work on this endeavor continues and introduced Professor Ryan Girard and Professor Celia Bardwell-Jones, two faculty members of the Summer Institute’s Gen Ed Curriculum Design Team (Design Team), to provide more specifics about the Gen Ed redesign process and its current status.

Professor Girard stated that the Design Team consisted of 14 faculty members and three undergraduate students that were recruited and selected through faculty and student governance groups and represented a broad spectrum of disciplines on all ten campuses of the university system. The Design Team researched, discussed, and debated every aspect of the Gen Ed core curriculum in order to develop a proposal that would be broadly accepted while addressing specific concerns and questions raised by the university community. He commended the efforts of the Design Team members noting that discussions between members are ongoing despite over 3000-person hours of work occurring over the last few months.

Professor Bardwell-Jones explained that the Design Team developed a proposal for a redesigned Gen Ed curriculum that is more of a competency-based model rather than a diversification-based model and distributed the proposal for external review. The proposal is currently in the process of being revised and edited based upon comments received from external reviewers and will be distributed to Design Team members for a full vote once the revisions and edits are completed, which is anticipated to occur over the next two weeks. If approved by the Design Team, the proposal will be sent to the faculty senates for further review. Dr. Christine Beaule, Director of the Gen Ed Program at UHM, added that the university has been working extensively with the executive committees of each of the faculty senates throughout the Gen Ed redesign process and that the faculty senates would be leading the formal consultation process on the proposed academic changes throughout the 2021-2022 academic year. She noted that a parallel consultation process to obtain direct feedback on the proposal from the broader university community will also occur during this time.

Regent Acoba remarked that the update on the Gen Ed redesign only contained an outline of the process, which makes it difficult to ask pointed questions and determine the point in the process where board involvement will be required. He suggested that the administration provide a narrative report on this issue to the board. AVP Halbert explained that the distribution of the draft Gen Ed redesign proposal to external reviewers did not align with the scheduled committee meeting on this issue which made it difficult to prepare a comprehensive, narrative report. However, a narrative report on the status of this proposal is currently being written and will be made available to regents.

Chair Wilson opined that the Design Team should remain cognizant of relationships between the thematic accreditation process being implemented by WSCUC and the Gen Ed redesign approach being proposed.

V. ADJOURNMENT
There being no further business, Regent Bal moved to adjourn, seconded by Regent Haning, and with all members present voting in the affirmative, the meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kendra T. Oishi
Executive Administrator and Secretary
of the Board of Regents