



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on International Affairs

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by

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HCR 316/HR 251 Urging the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) to Increase Hawai'i's Membership and Votes on WASC to Strengthen the State's Input on the Accreditation and Approval of Schools and Colleges in the Region

Chair Cabanilla, Vice Chair Tokioka, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HCR 316 (HR 251) and for your support of the University of Hawai'i. HCR 316 (HR 251) states that, as one of only two states in WASC, Hawai'i should have an equal voice and parity with California in WASC's Board of Directors. It suggests that that the University of Hawai'i's exclusion from the U.S. News' list of top 50 public universities may be an indicator of unequal representation on the WASC Commission.

The purpose of the Concurrent Resolution is to urge the Western Association of Schools and Colleges to increase Hawai'i's membership and votes on WASC to strengthen the State's input on the accreditation and approval of schools and colleges in the region.

With all due respect for the committee's intent, the University of Hawai'i does not support HCR 316 (HR 251), and we would like to clarify for the committee the purpose and process of accreditation, the role of WASC, and the relationship between WASC representation and university rankings.

The purpose of accreditation is to provide colleges and universities with a periodic opportunity to conduct an intensive and comprehensive self evaluation, review their own strengths and weaknesses against benchmarks and WASC standards, and promote improvement in their practices. Accreditation has existed for over one hundred years, and is grounded in key values of American higher education in our democracy, including: quality service to students; academic freedom; professionalism, and openness to learning and improvement.

The process of accreditation starts with a self study by the institution, followed by peer review, and proceeds to decision making by WASC Commissioners. WASC is a U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency, one of 7 regional agencies

and 11 national agencies that together accredit over 6,000 institutions. Participation is voluntary, but accreditation is vital for institutions that, for example, receive federal funds. Representation is set by the Bylaws for the appropriate WASC Association. There is no fixed representation by geographic area; rather the WASC Commission seeks to find appropriately qualified individuals from throughout the region.

WASC actions include accreditation, reaffirmation of accreditation, warning, probation, and termination of accreditation. Decisions on these actions are based on the WASC Standards related to institutional mission, student learning, resources, leadership and governance. WASC does not rank institutions.

The U.S. News rankings of institutions are for an altogether different purpose and establish their own procedures. According to an online explanation of “The ranking methodology” for rating *America’s Best Graduate Schools 2007*, ranking was based on opinion data and statistical indicator data selected by the magazine and gathered by surveys. These do not appear to be related or benchmarked to WASC accreditation standards or any other regional accreditation standards.

The University of Hawai‘i does not believe that a call for increased representation in WASC is appropriate or that such representation will have any effect on our rankings in publications like the U.S. News.