

UH Hilo Response to WASC Visiting Team Final Report

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the final accreditation report on UH Hilo's Special Visit Review. This response was developed by the UH Hilo executive staff, the leadership of the College of Hawaiian Language, and the accreditation liaison officer.

We truly appreciate the many commendations UH Hilo received in the Report of the WASC Visiting Team. Since the last WASC visit, which took place in 2004, the entire campus has been working hard to advance the university in many important ways: increasing enrollment, obtaining more extramural funding, planning and constructing new buildings, developing a new General Education program, assembling a new administrative team, instituting our Long Range Budget Planning Committee, demonstrating our commitment to diversity, and strengthening campus involvement in student learning assessment. It is encouraging to have the WASC team recognize the significant progress we have made as an institution.

With respect to the visiting team's recommendations, we take each of them seriously and are making plans to address them. The campus has been moving in the direction indicated by the recommendations, and the team's report will make it easier to build support for making necessary improvements.

In the near future, we will have an opportunity to use the strategic planning process to address recommendations made by the visiting team. UH Hilo's strategic plan is approaching the end of its term (2010), and planning initiatives at the System level are also prompting us to revise our plan. We propose to begin by revising our mission statement and engaging in pre-planning activities during academic year 2008-2009, following up with strategic planning in academic year 2009-2010.

In the pages that follow, our comments mainly address the four areas cited in the conclusion to the visiting team's report as requiring "further immediate focused attention."

Budgeting and Planning

The creation of the Long Range Budget Planning Committee is a major step forward in developing a transparent budgeting and planning process, which provides easily understood information for all constituents. However, since this committee has only been in existence for about 9 months, it is impossible for the WASC team to assess its effectiveness. The Committee should work toward reconciling the fundamental differences in philosophy between the Hilo campus and the system office with regard to enrollment budgeting (Report of the WASC Visiting Team, 2008, p. 31).

The UH system's inadequate support for enrollment growth at UH Hilo was noted in earlier WASC reports. In June of 2003, the WASC Action Letter called for "a much clearer and more transparent process at the system level specifying how financial allocations are being made, and *will* be made in the future." The site team that year had noted that "The core budget of UH Hilo has been eroded due to a lack of support for enrollment growth"

After years of struggling to obtain appropriate funding for increases in enrollment, we believe a breakthrough is occurring. We expect that House Bill 2978, which has passed both houses of the state legislature and has been submitted to the governor, will resolve this issue next year. The bill establishes a UH system task force to develop a funding formula for the allocation of fiscal resources among the UH campuses. The formula is to be linked to FTE enrollment and will take into consideration a number of factors, such as the cost of educating different categories of students. The task force will be assisted by an outside consultant with expertise in higher education finance.

House Bill 2978 should provide the impetus for the UH system to develop the clearer, more transparent, and predictable process called for by the 2003 WASC Action Letter and establish a more equitable system of resource allocation within the UH system.

Institutional Governance

The evolution of faculty-led academic governance is demonstrably improving. However, the Team is concerned that the two-tiered system continues to create inconsistent clarity in the processes for effective decision making. The University has also taken positive steps with the appointment of a complete team of qualified and committed executive administrators to partner with faculty leadership. However, the enrollment growth has strained UH Hilo's administrative operations. The Academic and administrative policy making and implementation is too often slow and lacks transparency and its documentation is inconsistent. The campus lacks agreement on the difference between consultation with faculty to inform academic and administrative decisions compared to the authority to make final decisions by the academic administrators. Therefore, UH Hilo organization structures and decision making processes require a formalized and codified determination of the roles, responsibilities and authority of the Cabinet, the Deans, the Faculty Congress and the College Senates (Report of the WASC Visiting Team, 2008, p. 32).

We intend to use the 2008-2009 academic year to review and codify the roles, responsibilities, and authority of the UH Hilo Faculty Congress, the college senates, Chancellor's Cabinet, Chancellor's Executive Council, Graduate Council, Academic Affairs Council, and the Long Range Budget Planning Committee. The governance bodies will be asked to revise their charters and bylaws. We believe that campus communication, policy formation, and policy documentation will improve as a result of this effort. The results of this review will be memorialized in writing and available on the campus website.

The vice chancellor for academic affairs is also instituting a Council of Deans, as recommended on page 16 of the Report of the WASC Visiting Team. The roles, responsibility and authority of the new council will be posted on the VCAA's website.

Educational Effectiveness

While the university has made a major step forward in passing and implementing a new program review policy, that policy needs to include more faculty involvement in and oversight of the process and a greater degree of buy-in from the faculty on the assessment requirement in the policy. In addition, the entire

university would benefit from immediate, focused attention on the value of assessment in fulfilling the faculty's responsibility for student learning (Report of the WASC Visiting Team, 2008, p. 32).

UH Hilo's progress in developing a culture of evidence and assessment has been slow but steady. A number of initiatives are planned for next year that will help our campus gain momentum in the assessment of student learning outcomes.

- The General Education program approved this spring thoroughly incorporates student learning outcomes and assessment. Preparations for implementing the program will go forward in the next academic year. During that time, individual courses must be certified as meeting criteria for the General Education program. This process will involve almost every department chair and many faculty members in demonstrating that the courses they propose for General Education align with learning outcomes specified in the GE program and assess these student learning outcomes.
- The revised program review guidelines, completed by the Congress Assessment Support Committee in April 2008 and approved by the Faculty Congress, strengthen the expectation that assessment and documentation of student learning are essential to the self study report. The vice chancellor for academic affairs will work with the UH Hilo Faculty Congress in 2008-2009 to continue to strengthen the assessment component and will ask the Congress to consider taking a more active role the program review process.
- We have requested the position of "assessment coordinator" in our budget request for the next biennium. This position will train and work closely with departmental faculty in the assessment of student learning outcomes.
- UH Hilo will send a team of faculty to the WASC assessment workshop in Spring 2009 in Honolulu.
- The vice chancellor for academic affairs will continue to work with the Faculty Congress Assessment Support Committee to fund assessment projects.
- Next year, we also plan to revise our mission statement and are discussing framing the mission in terms of student learning and student success.

PhD in Hawaiian and Indigenous Culture and Language Revitalization

While the team notes and appreciates the value of this program and the pride that the Hilo campus and the UH system take in this program, many issues have been raised that are related to the long-term viability and stability of the HLICR program. The University would benefit from immediate, focused study of these issues. Any decisions regarding new enrollments in the program should be put on hold until such time as the above studies are completed (Report of the WASC Visiting Team, 2008, p. 32).

We appreciate the team's acknowledgment of the unique nature of the PhD program in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization, and we are convinced that the team shares our desire that the program be both successful and of high quality.

Any review of this program must begin with the understanding that, as the substantive change proposal asserts, the PhD program is constructing a brand new field of scholarship. Currently, there are no doctorates in the revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures. Thus, all program faculty are "teaching somewhat out of their fields, but [...] use their expertise in research, analysis, and teaching to move the new field forward." Also, from the outset, it has been expected that the program would draw on "distinguished senior and emeriti faculty throughout the United States who have a strong personal commitment to indigenous communities and to the survival of indigenous languages and cultures" (attachment 1, substantive change proposal, p. 10).

We wish to make the case that the critical elements of this unique new PhD program have been reviewed and approved by WASC, and that the program is in full compliance with WASC expectations and should be allowed to continue without interruption.

The following is our response to the specific issues raised in the visiting team's report, based on information from the College of Hawaiian Language:

Dissertation proposals. The report implies that doctoral students are expected to have completed dissertation proposals immediately after completing their comprehensive exams (pp. 24-25). In fact, UH Hilo requires that a dissertation proposal be submitted within six months after completion of the comprehensive exam (attachment 2, university catalog, 2007-2008, p. 281). The five doctoral students completed their comprehensive exams between January and March 14, 2008, just before the WASC visit. As the report notes, one student had submitted her proposal before the team visit. The other four are in various stages of developing their proposals; this is fully consistent with program requirements.

The MA vs. the PhD in HILCR. The visiting team report asserts that faculty were unable to describe the differences between the MA and the PhD (p. 25). Faculty report that they were not asked to describe these differences at the meeting with the team. Moreover, the differences are laid out plainly in the substantive change proposal (attachment 1, Appendix A, pp. 21-25; Appendix B, pp. 32-37) and again in a May 6, 2006 memorandum submitted to WASC via the then-VCAA (attachment 3); the July 7, 2006 approval letter from WASC acknowledges receipt of this information (attachment 3).

Linguistics faculty. The team reported that "only one permanent faculty member [Dr. W.H. Wilson] has the academic background necessary to teach the linguistics courses in the program" (p. 25). As faculty informed the team during the visit, arrangements had already been made for the College of Hawaiian language to hire two tenure-track faculty with doctorates in linguistics to participate in the development of a faculty for this new field (attachment 4, letters of hire and CVs). Given the unique focus of the field, the College feels fortunate to have hired linguists with research expertise required for the program's strong focus on discourse and sociolinguistics. In addition to this linguistic expertise brought in by both new faculty members

through their study of the Japanese language, which has great sociolinguistic complexity, both have already developed conversational fluency in Hawaiian. They have additional experience with indigenous populations from East Asia (Ainu), North America (Tohono O'odham of Arizona), and the Pacific (Micronesia and Maori). The new hires are committed to further developing their understanding of Hawaiian and other indigenous languages and societies. They are presently serving on committees for students in the PhD program and are scheduled to teach one core course each for the next cohort of the doctoral program.

Doctoral students who are also faculty in the College of Hawaiian Language. The substantive change proposal submitted to WASC addresses the issue of the evaluation of the work of students who are also faculty in the College of Hawaiian Language (pp. 10-11, 167-168). The proposal was approved by WASC without further inquiry regarding this practice (attachment 3). It must be emphasized that doctoral students teach only undergraduate courses.

As is pointed out above, the newness of the field has meant that the program has been proactive in reaching out to scholars at other institutions: of the 26 credits offered to the first PhD cohort, 15 credits were taught by distinguished faculty outside the college, and 11 credits by college faculty with doctorates (attachment 5, PhD courses and faculty 2005-2007).

Relation of the PhD program to the language immersion schools. The language immersion schools are not part of the PhD curriculum, although PhD students may do research there and some of the present PhD students work there. Contrary to the report, Dr. Wilson is not in charge of the operation of the immersion schools (p. 26). Thus, it is not clear how we are to respond to the team's reference to "observation of immersion schools (actual visits)" as an area needing further study in terms of "capacity and educational effectiveness" (pp. 26-27).

Other issues raised in the report are being addressed by the college and by the institution as follows:

Transparency of curriculum requirements. The requirements for the PhD will appear in the 2008-2009 university catalog (attachment 6). These requirements incorporate some revisions to the curriculum approved in the substantive change proposal, and they were approved by the Graduate Council in October 2007. They will also appear on the university website following the publication of the new catalog.

Institutional commitment to the program. UH Hilo has set a high priority on a new building for the College of Hawaiian Language and has received planning and design funding from the state legislature. While the 2007-2009 budget allocation does not include construction funds, we are submitting this request for the 2009-2011 biennium.

Since its inception, the College of Hawaiian Language has been led by a director; the position of Dean of the College of Hawaiian Language has now been established, and the college hopes to begin a search in Spring 2009.

Oversight over curricular development in graduate programs, including the PhD program. The university's Graduate Council, the faculty Congress, the vice chancellor for academic affairs,

and the vice chancellor for research are now seeking to establish a university-wide protocol for curricular development and oversight for all degree programs at all levels.

Assessing educational effectiveness. A curriculum map that included student learning outcomes was submitted to the Commission in May 2006 via the then-VCAA along with other requested materials (attachment 3). Following this submission, the Commission approved the proposed program (attachment 3).

The PhD program faculty acknowledge that they delayed the adoption of assessment practices; however, they are now participating in UH Hilo's efforts to integrate student learning assessment into the campus culture. They took part in the Assessment Support Committee's project of reviewing student learning outcomes and working through a curriculum map, and will avail themselves of assessment support provided by the VCAA's office to programs in 2008-2009. The new program review guidelines, approved by the Congress this spring, will emphasize assessment and documentation of student learning, and the program will undergo program review in two years.

Attachments

- 1 Excerpts, Substantive change proposal for PhD program
- 2 Excerpt, *University of Hawai'i at Hilo 2007-2008 Catalog*
- 3 May 2006 memo to vice chancellor for academic affairs and July 2006 approval letter from Commission
- 4 New linguistics faculty in College of Hawaiian language: letters of hire and curriculum vitae
- 5 External faculty information
- 6 2008-2009 university catalog copy, PhD program