The External Review undertaken in March 2015 provides a perceptive overview of SPAS, identifying its current strengths and challenges and offering a number of suggestions for concrete steps that might be taken to address problems and maximize the success of SPAS in fulfilling its mission. In their introduction, the reviewers stress the uniqueness of SPAS in positive terms, but express a need to “reaffirm and refresh” its vision and its articulation with the rest of the campus. They warn against accepting the notion of SPAS as the “tip of the iceberg” of UHM’s commitment to and excellence in education relating to Asia and the Pacific, stating instead that SPAS should elevate its visibility. Recognizing the trend towards greater reliance on quantitative evaluations of academic programs, not only here at UHM but across the nation and beyond, the reviewers stress the danger of assessing SPAS using “narrow metrics,” as the reach across campus of SPAS’s degree programs and area studies centers is not easily quantifiable. The reviewers note, accurately, that SPAS centers are “diverse and asymmetrical” but do not recommend restructuring. In conformity with the mandate from the OVCAA, the review is devoted mostly to the academic programs and to the overall performance of SPAS as a small but complex unit of many constituent parts.

My response to the review is based on a combination of extensive discussions with individual chairs and directors, including a 90-minute SPAS chairs and directors’ meeting devoted entirely to key issues raised in the review (held April 17) and subsequent discussions with staff and some individual faculty members. These conversations have been invaluable in enabling me to provide here a response that reflects the collective wisdom of SPAS personnel. Some of the issues have been more fully explored than others, of course; and thus some of what follows necessarily reflects primarily my own initial thoughts on how best to address the reviewers’ suggestions.

The external review is organized into eight sections, each with one or more specific recommendation, most of these clearly labeled and appearing in boldface font. I will proceed systematically through these recommendations, elaborating to address additional issues, questions, and suggestions raised in the body of the review.

I. Under “Faculty Roles and Appointments,” the review recommends:
Mechanisms should be put in place to encourage communication about new initiatives begun outside of SPAS or the relevant center in order to promote more effective integration between SPAS and more of the Asia and Pacific initiatives at UH Mānoa. The UHM faculty leadership for such initiatives should be offered SPAS affiliate status if such status is not already in place.
The first step in addressing this recommendation is for me, as dean, to approach the leadership of other units on campus with an explicit request for establishing a regular practice of informing SPAS about new initiatives on Asia or the Pacific. For the larger units, it would be most expedient to work with the staff member in charge of “communications” and/or “international affairs.” The staff of the area studies centers are usually well-informed on new initiatives related to their area, especially those involved in the recent Title VI competition, for which the enumeration of activities on one’s campus that relate to the area (East Asia, Southeast Asia, or Pacific Islands in our case) figure prominently in determination of awards. However, this kind of information is not consistently gathered on a regular basis.

The recommendation to offer “affiliate” status in SPAS for faculty leadership on such initiatives may enable SPAS strengthen its base, though it is likely that most initiators would already enjoy such affiliation.

A second and more radical recommendation in this first section involves reassigning faculty lines:

**We propose that SPAS and the VCAA consider pursuing a change in the institutional bases upon which core faculty status is defined and sustained in the future.**

If this were possible, we in SPAS would welcome joint appointments of new faculty. However, we also realize that departments who recruit new faculty and support them in their bid for tenure would not be likely to approve this kind of structural change, at least not as routine. In fact, it might discourage some departments from hiring Asia or Pacific Islands area specialists (e.g. in History, Anthropology, Political Science) if there were a policy in place that offered the newly tenured faculty member the choice of moving 50% of her or his appointment to SPAS. This might be mitigated, at least somewhat, by the crosslisting of courses, such that CSS would not see a reduction in number of courses, though SPAS would gain. The way this could work with more obvious benefit to both the initial hiring department and SPAS would be the provision by the university (OVCAA?) of a net increase for the unit(s) involved in faculty lines. For example, if CSS hires 3 new faculty with expertise in different parts of Asia and all choose to move 50% of their appointment to SPAS, CSS would be provided with an additional line (not necessarily Asia-related). The net result on paper would be gain to SPAS of 1.5 FTE and a net loss to CSS of 0.5 FTE (lose 1.5, but gain 1.0), but CSS would actually have 4 faculty members instead of 3. Given the retrenchment we are currently facing, this does not seem possible in the short term, but further discussions might lead to a response to this recommendation that would be both beneficial for the UHM and be affordable.

A final set of recommendations (p. 8, item 3) the review offers in this first section, premised on implementation of the second recommendation just addressed:

**Create (or re-create) the post of Associate Dean responsible for curricular coordination and other more routine matters.**

As it seems unlikely that SPAS, with a part-time Dean, would be approved for hiring a part time Associate Dean. Curricular matters fall largely to the degree-granting program chairs. I have had to weigh in on some curricular matters and will likely have to do more so in the future. I am looking for creative, no-cost ways of delegating other “more
routine matters,” but often matters come right back to me as the only person authorized to deal with issues ranging from personnel to budget.

II. The second section, “SPAS Internal and University-Wide Articulation,” offers two main recommendations, followed by some suggestions regarding the SPAS “brand.”

**SPAS faculty should be encouraged to explore ways in which they can create curricular intersections across ASP and CPIS with intent to offer a multi-vantage point perspective on global problems often viewed both abstractly and implicitly through Western perspectives.**

Creating curricular intersections between ASP and CPIS is already underway. Profs. Abinales (ASP) and Kabutaulaka (CPIS) are preparing a course addressing political issues in Asia and the Pacific. Others are being discussed but are not as far along in planning. However, greater interaction between Asian and Pacific Islands Studies is part of the plan of action outlined in all three Title VI proposals (East Asia, Southeast Asia, Pacific Islands) and a new certificate in Asia-Pacific is also planned for proposal and implementation in the next two years. I plan to initiate further discussions regarding the addressing of global problems through Asian and Pacific Islands perspectives, but this will require coordination beyond SPAS to faculty members with requisite expertise in other units at UHM.

**In order to create greater visibility for UH faculty in Asian Studies and for SPAS more generally, we encourage SPAS and the UH Press to explore developing some signature thematic series, perhaps building on the subjects for which new curricular initiatives might also be mounted.**

Discussions are already underway on two major fronts with UH Press and SPAS. At our meeting in April, I asked for chairs and directors to encourage their faculty to consider proposing new series with the UH Press—specifically, series that reached across national and regional boundaries and addressed critical issues, such as the ones listed in the External Review (e.g., migration, climate change, sustainability, disaster management). I brought this up with UH Press director, Michael Duckworth, who attended the last SPAS chairs and directors meeting of the semester (May 15), where he indicated that the press would likely be open to at least one new proposal from SPAS. Some of the chairs and directors then met with me on June 9 to discuss possible themes and directions; Michael Duckworth and Asia Editor Pam Kelly were also in attendance. Further discussions will resume in August after faculty are back from summer break. A series theme and description will be proposed to the UH Press at some point during the fall semester, once we have identified faculty members committed to the work that initiating and managing such a series entails.

Several additional observations in this section:

**The SPAS contribution to EWC educational programs could be recognized and highlighted for its larger, international significance.**

I plan to discuss this with the Dean and now interim Director of Education at EWC, Mary Hammond, as well as with Terance Bigalke, who recently stepped down from his position as Director but is still on staff at 25%. Both seem positive about EWC-UHM
collaborations and would very likely be open and welcoming to addressing this observation in some productive way.

**Investments relating to SPAS “brand”** More focused efforts at highlighting features that go into branding could be developed—clean up a somewhat messy and inefficient set of websites associated with the different sub-units of the School. Aspects of “branding” and website are addressed again later in the External Review and I will comment later in this response on that issue. It should be noted, however, that shortly after my arrival at UHM in 2013, I worked with the UH Press on a jointly produced brochure introducing the SPAS faculty, programs, and centers, as well as the Asia and Pacific Islands series and titles already published by UH Press. This was current as of late fall 2013 and should be updated this coming academic year.

III. The third section, “Curricular Issues and Assessment” offers recommendations on strengthening the coherence and quality of our course offerings, and curricular planning: **The Review Committee recommends that faculty teaching core courses in ASP meet with the Assessment Officer to devise new strategies for conducting meaningful assessments that will ensure students are achieving the goals as stated.** Excessive demands on the new chair of ASP this year and the reduction in appointment from full to half-time of the ASP undergraduate advisor have prevented ASP from working as closely as we wished with the Assessment Office. However, the need for greater engagement with the Assessment Office, particularly in rethinking existing curriculum and designing new curriculum, is clearly recognized. I plan to work with the interim chair for 2015-16 and the undergraduate advisor to develop strategies along the lines outlined by the committee. These include reviewing not only new courses and curricula, but existing ones, and engaging all ASP faculty in working with the Assessment Office, sharing syllabi and making sure course goals address institutional learning outcomes.

IV. The fourth section, “Communications Strategy and Information Sharing” focuses on building better lines of communication among SPAS faculty, staff, and students, as well as with prospective students and others across campus and beyond. **The Review Committee recommends the appointment of a full-time Media Specialist tasked with publicizing the SPAS “story”.** Such a technician would be responsible for creating easy templates for publicizing syllabi, creating alumni vignettes, featuring new achievements in ASP and CPIS among faculty and students, and so forth. Recognizing the realities of personnel costs and budget constraints at UHM, the review committee suggested opting for a GA or even an undergraduate on work-study to take this on. Though the job description for the GAs for 2015-16 had already been advertised and the positions filled, there is still the possibility of assigning one or more of them some website and/or social media work. However, initial discussions with SPAS chairs and directors indicated wide concurrence that in the future one GA position should be devoted primarily to communications. Working towards greater consistency on the SPAS website will require considerable planning as well as web expertise, but is an
important goal towards which we will work. Keeping the existing website up to date is essential and realizable in AY 2015-16.

**Given the fact that many students across the spectrum of ASP—from Japan to South Asia—confront similar problems, we encourage ASP to hold a joint orientation session for incoming ASP students that will familiarize them with each other, and also with the important resources at the university.** We also recommend that graduate students and key faculty meet periodically as a group to listen to shared concerns and work on across-the-board fixes. These are excellent recommendations and will be put into action beginning in fall 2015.

We are still discussing the timing, but at some point very early in the fall, SPAS will hold an orientation for all new students and strongly urge continuing students to attend as well. Emphasis will be on information sharing, including a tour of the library facilities (Asia Collection, Pacific Collection), practical information on scholarships and fellowships, academic expectations, deadlines, and so forth. An important byproduct will be building of a sense of community across regional areas of interest. It is hoped that this may also contribute to greater interactions between ASP and CPIS.

The implementation of the graduate students meeting with key faculty will be discussed further prior to the beginning of the fall semester and a schedule set.

V. The fifth section, “Student Support and Academic Outcomes,” follows closely from the second portion of the previous section. Responding to points raised by students during their meetings, the review committee recommended:

**Engage SPAS students in discussions of systemic information systems weaknesses and develop responses to these issues through student advising, IT improvements, or coordination with other administrative units.**

Though not appropriate for the beginning-of-the-semester informational and community-building session mentioned above, periodic meetings to which SPAS students are invited (and incentivized with refreshment offerings) will be set up during the fall and spring semesters to solicit input on advising and IT issues. We will explore how best to address the review committee’s suggestion of consolidating student advising, providing a checklist for courses that satisfy SPAS undergraduate course requirements. As Dean, I will discuss the recommendation regarding the graduate admission process being a fully online procedure, as it is at most of our peer institutions.

In order to address the recent decrease in ASP majors (BA and MA), the review committee reported rising costs and limited fellowship/scholarship funding as a key concern. This is one I address in my meetings with donors and potential donors and am also working on in a new initiative with the Luce Foundation. Aside from funding, though, the review committee recognized other areas that could be addressed in order to increase enrollments. One was the continued focus on single-area expertise in both the undergraduate and graduate programs in ASP. We are addressing this with the addition of a new “Inter Asia” track at the graduate level, as well as a single “Asian Studies” certificate program, currently under review by the OGE.

The committee recommended:
SPAS leadership, faculty, alumni and student efforts in SPAS could lead to innovative ways to draw in new majors—through more effective internet presence, special events, new certificate or joint programs with professional schools, etc.—and to communicate new or alternative career pathways linked to a SPAS degree. At the same time, financial aid and student support services can be reinforced in order to attract international students, ensure timely degree completion, and enable academic success for non-traditional students.

This is perhaps the most important, and the most challenging, of the many recommendations made by the reviewers. It is one thing to keep a website info up-to-date; it is another altogether to develop a “more effective internet presence,” but we acknowledge its importance and plan to involve a GA and/or other student help in initiating the process. The various Centers in SPAS hold numerous special events throughout the year, but other than the annual Graduate Student Conference, held every spring, SPAS has not done so. We have begun preliminary discussions (which I intend to pursue and push forward) regarding a SPAS event, possibly in conjunction with International Week, a week in November proclaimed by the U.S. Dept. of Education for promoting international education a range of activities that are not prescribed centrally but determined by individual campuses. Before we host an event, however, we are planning to work closely among ourselves and with Tara Loty, the new Director of Alumni Engagement for the UH Foundation to identify SPAS alumni who are in the area (especially on O’ahu) and could attend and share their own stories. These contacts will also figure centrally “telling the SPAS story,” giving current and prospective students a clearer picture of what kinds of careers SPAS graduates have followed and what role SPAS played in getting them there.

It is not clear what the last component in the bolded recommendation above might actually entail. We strive always to make available scholarship and fellowship funding, but the high costs, particularly for out-of-state (including international) students makes this a difficult area in which to achieve significant progress in the near future. It is hoped that the rumors of a large-scale new initiative from the Luce Foundation in a few years may incorporate substantial assistance to students in the form of fellowship support.

VI. With regard to “Administrative Systems and Staffing” (the sixth section), the committee noted “a need for greater channels of communication between members of the administrative staff and Center Directors and among the staff themselves.” And after reporting on specific difficulties some staff members have with the multiple and cumbersome financial/budgeting systems, the committee made the following basic recommendation:

**Make it possible for administrative staff members across the spectrum of SPAS to meet periodically to share concerns and best practices, which should result in a reduction of inefficiency and contribute toward a sense of shared purpose more broadly throughout the School.**

This recommendation has already resulted in one SPAS-wide meeting of secretaries and comparable administrative APTs at which we laid out a schedule for a series of four meeting next fall and early spring. At each meeting, two staff members each take 30 minutes to talk about their unit, its basic activities, accomplishments, and administrative challenges. It is hoped that these sessions will not only lead to a better understanding
across units and a better sense of SPAS-wide community, but will also result in efficiencies in problem solving.

VII. In the seventh section, “Infrastructure and Technology,” the reviewers returned to issues relating to technology, noting first the “rather dingy and cramped state of Moore Hall,” and suggested that university funds be devoted to some improvements, rather than relying on outside sources (such as Hanban or the Korean government). SPAS has spent some funds on minor remodels, such as the work necessary to create separate office spaces for the two new hires in Pacific Islands Studies last year, but not the kind of major work that would address the aspects raised by the reviewers. Funds from Hanban for remodeling space on the first floor of Moore Hall (makai wing) for our “Model Confucius Institute” will certainly help to address this issue, at the same time unifying the physical placement of our Confucius Institute staff, who are currently housed in three different locations on campus and at the EWC (Burns Hall).

The other issue covered in this section relates to IT: The Review Committee proposes that SPAS shape a strategy (e.g., through appointing a task force including student representation) to identify needed improvements in IT infrastructure and content, to look for cost-effective ways to update and integrate internet resources across the academic programs and Centers, and to explore effective usage of social media to further the profile and awareness of SPAS globally.

As dean, I have already introduced this issue to the chairs and directors and will devote a full meeting to these issues early in the fall, at which time I will appoint a task force (including student representation—which we all feel is essential) to address the internet resources, as well as effective use of social media. We began discussing SPAS internet issues at my first SPAS chairs’ and directors’ meeting in fall 2013, and subsequently made substantial improvements to the ASP pages, but due to staffing issues have only made sporadic changes since. With very little likelihood of additional budget to cover even a half-time position devoted to media (see the first recommendation under Section IV), it is likely that a GA will be tasked with this important duty, at the latest by fall 2016. But before then the task force will be asked to recommend measures to address this matter in the short term.

VIII. In the eighth section, “Comments on Area Centers,” the reviewers draw attention to the dependence of the Centers on Title VI funding, the under-staffing of the COS (Center for Okinawan Studies), and the reduction in course offerings and faculty representation resulting from the drawing on permanent ASP faculty for Center directorships (Japan and Philippines). All of these we fully acknowledge, but without additional revenue streams are unable to resolve in the near future. Title VI would seem to be secure through the current 4-year cycle (to August 2018), and we hope beyond that. The current understaffing the COS may be possible to address with funding from a newly evolving consortium on Okinawan Studies involving the University of the Ryukyus and Meio University in Okinawa, UH Manoa, and possibly San Francisco State University. The reduction in number of Center directors coming from outside of SPAS will mean fewer
voices/fewer opinions expressed in meetings and in strategic planning but the intellectual and administrative savvy of all current and incoming directors is very strong. If small pockets of savings emerge, such as a leave without pay, I plan to use the funds to hire lecturers to counter the reduction in course offerings.

The reviewers recommend that:
**As a distinctive part of SPAS with important roles across the UHM campus, the Asia Centers should collaborate on a region-wide basis to identify themes for research, student engagement and public programs.**
The Asia Centers are already collaborating on some thematic matters, such as the Chinese diaspora throughout Asia (and the Pacific). Although the directors of all the centers meet with me once a month, they do not meet on any routine basis otherwise, and thus do not have a regularized mechanism for developing the kind of region-wide themes the reviewers are suggesting here. Here, as in most American universities, research in the social sciences and especially in humanities, often individual rather than collaborative. Coordinating region-wide themes would seem more achievable in student engagement—coursework, guest speakers, and public programs such as media showings, performances, or conferences. All of these require some level of funding. With the dean’s discretionary funds, though modest, it should be possible to promote region-wide projects that help to address this final recommendation from the reviewers.

**Concluding remarks:**
The SPAS external reviewers clearly learned a great deal about SPAS in this process, and they have provided us with a thorough review, with a helpful and specific list of recommendations. Most of the recommendations I see as addressable within our current constraints in personnel and budget. We anticipate making good use of this report to improve our image and brand across campus and beyond, to serve our current students more effectively than we do currently, and to strategize for the future, while maintaining the excellence in teaching and research that has long been our hallmark.