February 28, 2008

Virginia Hinshaw
Chancellor
University of Hawaii at Manoa
2500 Campus Road
Honolulu, HI 96822

Dear Chancellor Hinshaw:

At its meeting on February 20-22, 2008, the Commission considered the report of the team that conducted a Special Visit to the University of Hawaii at Manoa on October 29-31, 2007. The Commission also had available to it the University’s Special Visit Report and supplement, and the January 30, 2008 letter from ALO Peter Quigley, providing a useful update on the issues raised in the team report.

The Special Visit was requested following the spring 2004 visit to the UH System Office over concerns about the progress being made by the Manoa campus. A progress report, originally scheduled for fall 2005, was shifted to a special visit. Due to leadership transitions, the visit was postponed first to spring 2007 and then, with the impending transition to a permanent chancellor, to fall 2007. The Commission appreciates the willingness of the campus to extend the timing of the visit. As reflected by the team, such an extension proved valuable in learning of the progress achieved during this period and your priorities as chancellor.

The original progress report was to address four issues: planning; leadership and governance; financial management and resource allocation; and educational effectiveness and the assessment of student learning. These became the foci of the special visit. The Commission was pleased to note that the University has made significant progress in each area, and from the letter of January 30, 2008, it would appear that further progress has been made since the team visit.

Planning. The campus engaged in a broadly inclusive planning process leading to a strategic plan, Defining our Destiny. This plan laid a good foundation for the University. It now appears to have largely been superseded by an equally inclusive process, which led to the institutional Proposal for the next WASC comprehensive reaccreditation cycle. The key foci of the
Proposal are embraced by the new campus leadership, and provide a basis for future planning and campus engagement. The issues identified in the Proposal, accepted by the WASC Proposal Review Committee, are vital elements for the future of the University. The Commission urges that they be seen not only as areas "for WASC" but also as key areas for institutional engagement and improvement. And, as the team recommends, there are other issues to be included in the planning and prioritization of University attention over the coming years, such as addressing the needs of the library.

**Leadership and Governance.** The Commission, in requesting the special visit, had been concerned about the stability and sufficiency of the University’s leadership. At the time the visit was requested, there was an inadequate campus administration to support the size and complexity of the University. There was also a concern over the relationship of functions between the campus and the UH Office of the President. Further, there were plans for reorganization of the student affairs office that appeared stalled. These issues have been satisfactorily resolved. The reorganization of the Office of Student Affairs has been accomplished and new leadership is in place. An important transition occurred with the interim chancellor and you are now installed as the permanent chancellor, providing new leadership and direction. Over these several years as well, effective communication patterns have been established with the System President; in addition, the Manoa administration has been filled in through funding and special arrangements with the President.

Further decisions will need to be made about the structure and organization of the campus in relation to the various schools, especially arts and sciences, and the possible sharing of personnel and functions with the Office of President by Manoa administrators. Equally important will be further clarification of the roles of the campus and of the System in each functional area where there has been overlap. The appointment of a Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs appears to be moving forward and will fill a critical need. In addition, there are a number of interim positions that will need to be filled through permanent appointments. The Commission noted that the medical school dean position had been filled, which is an important step for the University. As reported by the team, there is an openness and transparency about these issues, and a desire to build an effective administrative structure and team.

**Financial Management and Resource Allocation.** The special visit identified a number of areas where progress has been made. With the allocation of tuition to the campus, and some increases in funding from the State, there is an opportunity for the campus to undertake important initiatives. There is increased budget planning and communication, and more involvement of the deans and faculty in setting priorities. At the same time, a number of critical issues remain for the University to address.

Deferred maintenance has been a longstanding issue at the University and has reached significant proportions. The University’s letter of January 30th indicates that this matter is achieving visibility. However, the team report noted that the funding for repairs and maintenance is significantly below what is needed. This is a matter of great concern.
In addition, the team noted that the State budget provided no additional funding for the University library, even though it was the highest priority of the UH. This also is a longstanding problem that needs priority attention.

Enrollment management is also a key issue for the University and has a significant impact on the financial and educational effectiveness of the campus. This includes addressing admissions, support for students while enrolled, retention, and graduation. Finally, in this area, both the University and the team noted the issue of potential faculty retirements and the impact it will have on the future of the University.

Together, these issues present significant challenges for the University. The Commission notes that the University – at the campus and system levels – is aware of them and has made them priorities for special attention. Progress in addressing them will be critically important for the future success of the University. The Commission will pay special attention to these issues at the forthcoming Capacity and Preparatory Review.

**Assessment of Student Learning.** The team identified a number of areas where progress has been made to address the assessment of student learning and to improve student success. The campus has begun to set into place an infrastructure for embedding assessment into University culture. Funding has been provided, and the January 30th letter indicates that there will be assessment directors hired to assist departments and faculty in undertaking assessment and program review. The general education program has also begun to assess outcomes. The team reported that faculty engagement needs to be strengthened, and that there is variability across departments in the understanding and implementation of assessment. Efforts underway to address these issues will need to be continued. Because assessment of student learning is a major focus of the University’s Proposal, it will be one of the key issues addressed in the forthcoming accreditation review.

The team also reported that the Student Success Center holds great promise, and that attention is being given to improve student advising. These are key steps in supporting students, as well as in addressing retention and graduation rates.

In sum, much has been accomplished since the last visit, and the transition to new leadership has served the University well. While many challenges remain, there is a clear sense of direction – and a commitment for the University community to work together to address its challenges.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the report of the Special Visit team.
2. Continue with the Capacity and Preparatory Review scheduled for spring 2009.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the Chair of the institution’s governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further
engagement and improvement, and to support the institution’s response to the specific issues identified in them.

A copy of this letter will also be sent to President David McClain, in accordance with a separate Commission policy.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the Commission’s actions or the contents of this letter.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff  
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc:  Sherwood Lingenfelter  
David McClain  
Board Chair  
Peter Quigley, ALO  
Members of the team