July 10, 2012

Gene Awakuni
Chancellor
University of Hawaii – West Oahu
96-129 Ala Ike
Pearl City, HI 96782

Dear Chancellor Awakuni:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to the University of Hawaii – West Oahu (UHWO) April 3-5, 2012. The Commission also reviewed the CPR report and exhibits submitted by the University prior to the visit and your response to the team report, dated May 31, 2012. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit by conference call with you and your colleagues, Joe Mobley, interim vice chancellor for academic affairs; Jacque Kilpatrick, associate vice president for programs; Susan Pelowski, academic program officer; Elaine Lee, director of institutional research and accreditation liaison officer; Donna Kyosaki, vice chancellor for administration; and Denise Iseri-Matsubara, executive assistant to the chancellor. The updates, additional information, and observations you provided were helpful.

UHWO’s institutional proposal outlined two themes for the Capacity and Preparatory Review: (1) Fostering Student Success, and (2) Organizing for Growth. These themes had been parsed into specific goals, each of which was addressed in the institution’s report. In view of UHWO’s 2007 transition to a four-year institution and the admission of its first class of freshmen, the focus on a successful First-Year Experience was timely. Analytic data revealed modestly positive progress in retention resulting from a number of related initiatives.

With the anticipated occupancy of the remarkable new Kapolei campus in fall 2012, and with expanded academic offerings incorporated in the Academic Development Plan (ADP), the second theme of organizing for growth was also timely. The team was enthusiastic in its report about the scale and quality of the new campus and on UHWO’s leadership’s considerable successes in bringing together financial, governmental, developer, system, and community interests on behalf of the new campus. Data-supported evidence and reflection on the academic plan, however, was uneven, with indications that the ADP is not being consistently followed. A number of academic initiatives, essential for fully optimizing the move to the spacious new campus, appear to have lost momentum. The team also expressed concern about the institution’s inability to recruit and retain experienced senior academic leadership. The Commission has serious concerns about the lack of progress in this and other areas identified in the 2008 Special Visit and in earlier reviews.
The Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and recommendations of the team and identified the following areas for attention prior to the next visit.

**Addressing leadership turnover.** From as early as 2005, the Commission has expressed concern about the pattern of transitory leadership, particularly in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Notwithstanding the impressive developments in the creation of the new campus, the Commission remains deeply concerned about its apparent inability to gain the attention of the UHWO executive leadership to effectively address this continuing problem. While policies and procedures related to recruitment and retention of senior leaders have been implemented, the Commission is concerned that the desired outcomes are yet to be achieved. As noted by the team, “almost all of the senior staff [has] been replaced since 2008” and key positions were being held by interim appointees. Key academic initiatives that can seize the multiple opportunities intrinsic in the Kapolei campus will require the long-term guidance of experienced senior academic leaders. The Commission is eager to see both stability and sophistication in academic leadership and other related positions, and expects to see a stable, qualified leadership team in place by the time of the next review. (CFRs 1.3, 3.1, 3.8, 3.10)

**Re-focusing on the strategic plan.** The refocusing and energizing of the Academic Development Plan and the linking of it to budget and resource allocation; the development of a suitable faculty hiring and evaluation plan in anticipation of planned growth; and linking an increasingly complex academic enterprise through effective communication structures all need urgent attention. As stated by the team, UHWO needs to have “identified the academic organization that [it] must have in five years, determined the faculty and staff … needed to sustain [it] … and selected … a core suite of academic programs that define” it. The Commission expects to see an effective plan in place and being implemented by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.8, 3.11, 4.1-4.3)

**Creating a student-centered environment at the new campus.** The Commission envisions the massive undertaking that will unfold within weeks of the date of this action as UHWO relocates to a setting that will redefine the character of the institution. The Commission expects the institution to utilize this transition to more fully actualize its commitment to a student-centered infrastructure. Attention is needed to ensure a sufficiently resourced library with qualified staff and appropriate technology, well-equipped disability services and testing centers, and clear and effective student governance structures. (CFRs 2.13, 3.1, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1-4.3)

**Preparing for the Educational Effectiveness Review.** The team found that UHWO had made progress on building the infrastructure for assessment of student learning and creating a “culture of assessment.” The Commission expects that by the time of the EER visit, UHWO will have made further improvement in its staffing, quality assurance, and assessment systems, including better framing of some learning outcomes, stating outcomes on course syllabi, beginning to assess co-curricular areas, and implementing assessment of general education. Further, the team will need to examine findings from assessment to learn whether students are meeting expected outcomes at appropriate levels and whether the University is using these findings to improve student learning and achievement. The team will also evaluate the quality and effectiveness of
the program review process by studying a sampling of recently completed program reviews. (CFRs 2.2-2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.4)
In summary, the Commission’s overriding concern focuses on the failure of leadership to
effectively address the long-standing pattern of transitory senior academic leadership. The
potential for students to gain occupancy of a new campus, while the academic programs there are
largely lacking in leadership, is a matter of great concern to the Commission. The team’s report
portrays a number of key academic initiatives that lack the coherence and direction that the
University requires at this transformational moment in its history. It is time for the University,
and the University of Hawaii System if needed, to take more decisive action so that the transition
to the new campus will fulfill its promise for students, faculty, staff and the surrounding
community. The Commission action is intended to highlight the importance of this issue and
indicate that if it goes uncorrected, a finding of noncompliance with Commission Standards
would be made.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of
   University of Hawaii – West Oahu.

2. Reschedule the Educational Effectiveness Review visit from fall 2013 to spring 2014.
   The Institutional Report is due 12 weeks prior to the scheduled visit.

3. Impose a Formal Notice of Concern with regard to the issues identified in this letter, with
   a particular emphasis on the creation of a qualified senior academic leadership team and
   demonstrated action on plans for the institution’s growth and development.

4. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter
   and to the major recommendations of the CPR team report into its Educational
   Effectiveness Review report. You may include this analysis in an appendix to your
   Educational Effectiveness report or incorporate it into the report.

The Commission also requests a meeting between WASC staff and representatives of the
Institution, including senior leadership, faculty leadership, and the ALO within 90 days
following receipt of this letter. For independent institutions such meetings typically include the
chair or a leader of the Board of Trustees. For UWHO we would want to discuss with you
whether a representative of the UH System Office or the Board of Regents would be appropriate.
The purposes of the meeting are to further communicate the reasons for the Commission action
and to discuss the institution’s plan for responding to it. Arrangements can be made to conduct
this meeting via Skype or another video conferencing service. Please contact Amy Allington to
schedule this meeting.

A Formal Notice of Concern action provides notice to an institution that, while it currently meets
WASC Standards, it is in danger of being found in noncompliance with one or more Standards if
current trends or findings continue. If the issues are not addressed by the time of the EER visit, a
sanction will be imposed, triggering the two-year rule as described in the 2008 Handbook of Accreditation.

In extending the time frame until the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), the Commission hopes to provide the institution with time to build upon its progress to date, so that by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review, University of Hawaii – West Oahu will be able to demonstrate that it has successfully navigated the transition to its new campus as well as recruited and empowered qualified senior academic leadership. On behalf of the EER visiting team, the Commission also urges those responsible for the preparation of the self-study to address each of the required topics for an EER report and to select appropriate documents to support the assertions and analysis contained in its report.

In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to President M.R.C. Greenwood and the chair of University of Hawaii’s Board of Regents in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website in approximately one week. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/rw

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
    Elaine Lee, ALO
    Eric K. Martinson, Board Chair
    MRC Greenwood, Chancellor, University of Hawaii System
    Members of the CPR team
    Richard Winn