

# REPORT OF THE WASC SPECIAL VISIT TEAM

To  
University of Hawaii, Office of the President

May 7 - 9, 2013

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The team evaluated the institution under the WASC Standards of Accreditation and prepared this report containing its collective evaluation for consideration and action by the institution and by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. The formal action concerning the institution's status is taken by the Commission and is described in a letter from the Commission to the institution. This report and the Commission letter are made available to the public by publication on the WASC website.

**WASC SPECIAL VISIT**  
**UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM**  
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Section I—Team Report

Introduction

In September 2012, a team conducted a special visit to the University of Hawai'i System Office to follow up on recommendations made following a visit in 2009. The original purpose of the 2012 visit was to assess matters of concern raised in 2009 regarding the impact of leadership changes at the University, changes in the manner of selection of Regents, the composition and effectiveness of the Board of Regents, the relations between the University and the state legislature, enrollment management and retention across the University System, and the foundation of the accreditation of the senior campuses within the system. The team considered a special report prepared by President Greenwood regarding these matters that also highlighted other subjects including the organization of the System Office, changes in accounting and budgeting, relations with the governor, the impact of tuition increases on finances and on student success, research initiatives, improvements in student success (particularly for Native Hawaiians), and facilities renovation. These last several items were the focus of the strategic initiatives launched by President Greenwood.

During its visit in September 2012, the team also considered the actions and reactions to a failed potential Stevie Wonder concert. This latter was of moment due to legislative and other actions that were occurring or impending as a result of investigations and concerns raised in the wake of the loss of \$200,000 resulting from the concert matter.

The team's report was sent to the Commission in the fall of 2012. It highlighted considerable progress in achieving the objectives of the strategic initiatives launched by the president, especially in the success of Native Hawaiian students and funded research. In addition, the team concluded that the manner of selection of regents had not caused difficulties and that the tuition approach used by the University, coupled with strong financial management, had permitted the University to sustain and improve its effectiveness despite severe reductions in state financial support.

However, the team raised a number of concerns. These revolved primarily around two matters: lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities between the president and the chancellor of the flagship Manoa campus and the possible incursion of political leaders into the appropriate level of autonomy for the University. In reviewing the team report in February 2013, the Commission reiterated these concerns and reframed them around the following areas: external interference, policy gaps, system – campus lines of authority, and the role of the Board of Regents. Citing several areas where the governance of the University may not be in compliance with Commission Standards, the Commission wrote in its letter

to President Greenwood March 11, 2013:

The Commission does not accredit the System per se; however, the failure of the University to meet Commission Standards affects the entire University, especially the four campuses accredited by the Senior College Commission.

The Commission also requested that the WASC President schedule meetings within 120 days with key leaders to discuss these concerns, George Pernsteiner, the chair of the September 2012 visit, was invited to join the visit.

#### Visit Process

On the day prior to their arrival in Hawai'i, MRC Greenwood, the President of the University of Hawai'i, announced her retirement, effective in September 2013. That action added a new dimension to the visit, one of assessment of the readiness of the state and the university to prepare for a successful transition to new leadership at the University.

The team conducted a number of meetings organized around the concerns of the Commission and the presidential transition that included leaders of the legislature, the Governor and his education assistant, the leadership of the Board of Regents, UH Manoa Chancellor Tom Apple, the chair of the Regents Working Group on Structure and Organization, and President Greenwood and Executive Vice President Johnsrud. Since the visit was a follow up requested by the Commission for discussion purposes and to communicate Commission concerns, no report was requested or submitted by the University.

#### Team Findings and Discussion

a. External Interference. At the time of the September 2012 visit, hearings were being scheduled by the Senate Accountability Committee. Several public hearings were conducted which addressed issues regarding the Wonder concert, the contract of the Manoa athletic director and several other matters. During the legislative session a number of bills were introduced that would have curtailed the autonomy of the University in conducting its affairs. Most of these proposals were not enacted by the Legislature in its 2013 session. One bill that did pass transferred the leadership function for construction contracts from the University president to the State of Hawai'i's Department of Administration and General Services, the agency that oversees construction contracting for most other state agencies. No one at the university was able to explain to reviewers how this new law will affect university contracting. In fact, the team heard more than one description of how it will do so. (This change was appended to a bill that prescribed alterations in how suggestions are made to the governor regarding nominees for the Board Regents and when the Regents are to elect their officers.) Although some University officials saw the contracting change as potentially problematic, no one was able yet either to describe who was now responsible for contracting, or how it would be done. However, the team did not meet with anyone in the president's office charged directly with contracting.

Although few of the many legislative proposals that would have affected the University's autonomy were enacted into law, several survived as provisos to the budget act. This limits the effective duration of the provisos to the two-year term of the budget. Most of the provisos require detailed reporting, some of it applicable to all state agencies. Two, however, would appear to have more direct impact on the constitutional authority of the Board of Regents to oversee the operations of the University. The first would require that the compensation for those employees whose pay would exceed that of the governor be approved in advance by the Board of Regents. That authority now is delegated to the

president or even to chancellors, vice chancellors and others. The other directs the development of a budget plan that would divert funding from the Manoa campus to other campuses within the University without specifying how this should be done. This latter is a provision that the state's attorney general had earlier opined exceeded the legislature's authority. At the time of the visit, the Board of Regents had requested an interpretation of the legality of these provisos from the Attorney General, but the response of the attorney general had not yet been received by the University. The implementation of the provisos, especially this last one, could lead to a loss of appropriate autonomy and warrants continued monitoring and concern.

b. Role of the Regents The Commission was concerned that the responsibilities of the Regents might not have been exercised properly in the Stevie Wonder situation and its aftermath. The working group commissioned by the Regents was expected to share with them on May 16 its findings and recommendations regarding both the role of the Regents in the Wonder incident and the roles and practices of the Regents more generally. The team did not have access to the report and would hope that it will be comprehensive and that its findings will lead to the adoption, implementation and communication by the Regents of necessary changes.

c. System-Campus Lines of Authority As with the matter of policy gaps, this fundamental matter has not yet been completely and satisfactorily addressed by the working group and implemented by the University. Some actions were proposed last autumn that directly pertain to the Wonder concert matter. However, the team does not yet know if those actions have been implemented and awaits a matrix and report from the University that is said to address this matter. It is not clear if the steps taken by the University to address internal policy issues have been widely communicated. Of perhaps more import, however, is that the working group has not yet issued a report and recommendations to the Regents regarding whether the problems found in the Wonder matter are systemic and should lead to more widespread changes in policies and practices both within the system and at the Manoa campus. As of yet, no further delineation of the lines of responsibility between the president and the chancellor of the Manoa campus have been developed and conversations with both the President and Manoa Chancellor suggest that this is needed. The team was told this would be part of a later effort by the working group. The delay in dealing with these matters and the fact that the resolution of even those the University's administrators say have been addressed has not been communicated effectively concerns the team. The issues of clear responsibility that were raised by the team last fall have not been put to rest despite the continued efforts of the working group.

d. Policy Gaps The Commission identified policy gaps as another area of concern—a matter that was also identified in the Fact finding Report on the Wonder concert. As with the role of the Regents and the clarity of responsibilities between the system and the Manoa campus, this topic awaits further work by the working group and action by the Regents.

e. Readiness for Presidential Succession The retirement of President Greenwood offers an opportunity to rebuild now frayed relations between the University and the state's elected leaders. The state of those relations was questionable when the prior team visited in the fall of 2012 and appears to have worsened since then, to the detriment of the University. Leaders expressed hope that a new president could bring a new level of connection and trust between themselves and the University. The team acknowledges this and also is hopeful. However, the matters set forth in the Commission's March 11 letter must be resolved successfully if a new president is to have clear responsibilities and trust is to be rebuilt. Continued delay in forthrightly acknowledging errors, clarifying roles, and appropriately changing rules and practices will undermine the possibilities for success that a new president might have

even if that president were popular upon selection with all communities and constituencies. It will also be important for the process used for the selection of the new president to be transparent, and lead to identification of the expectations and priorities for the next president to fulfill.

## Section II: Recommendations of the May 2013 Team

- a. The team recommends that the University move quickly to implement the recommendations of the initial effort of the working group and to communicate broadly and effectively that changes have been made to address the issues raised in the Wonder matter and others that arose during the past year, and ensure that similar problems will not recur.
- b. The team recommends that the Board of Regents review carefully the report and recommendations of its working group regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Regents and that the Regents take quick and decisive action to address any shortcomings or ambiguities identified.
- c. The team recommends that the working group conclude its efforts rapidly on the other matters before it so that it can recommend appropriate additions and changes in policies and clarify roles and responsibilities and, further, that the Regents and the University adopt and implement as quickly and publicly as possible any needed changes.
- d. The team recommends that the Board of Regents should determine the appropriate roles and responsibilities of a president and the qualities such a president would need for success and then move expeditiously to select a president for the University who will provide leadership, healing, stability, and continued focus on the strategic initiatives while maintaining the degree of autonomy appropriate to ensure effective and successful operations of the University.
- e. The team recommends that the University provide to the WASC staff all of the reports of the working group and the actions taken by the University to implement its recommendations.
- f. The team recommends that the University provide to WASC staff any opinion by the Hawai'i attorney general concerning the budget provisos adopted by the Legislature in 2013.
- g. The team recommends that the Commission staff continue to be apprised by the University of actions by both the University and the state government that affect the autonomy of the University.