MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. David Ericson  
Co-Chair, Strategic Planning Committee  
Vice Chancellor Reed Dasenbrock  
Co-Chair, Strategic Planning Committee

FROM: Jonathan Dial  
President, Graduate Student Organization at the University of Hawai‘i

SUBJECT: FEEDBACK FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN DRAFTS

The Graduate Student Organization (GSO) Executive Council submits the following feedback on the Strategic Plan for your review.

**Strategic Planning for Admission and Recruitment Committee (SPARC)**

The GSO Executive Council supports the general direction of the draft plans from the SPARC Committee.

Comments & Suggestions:

- Update the admissions and graduate program websites
  - Consider including a contact list of current students within each program who would be willing to talk with potential students. That list (with contact information) could be posted on program websites and regularly maintained by those programs.

- Hire “Road Warriors” who will be recent grads who will recruit on O‘ahu and the neighbor islands
  - Consider including graduate students as “Road Warriors”, and focus their efforts on in-state and west coast institutions of higher learning. Prioritize current graduate students who received bachelor’s degrees from UH Mānoa.

- Increase graduate student financial assistance
  - This is certainly a justifiable goal, but how will this be achieved specifically? Consider forming a working group of recruitment experts, current graduate students, and administrators to develop a concrete, detailed plan and timeline for meeting this objective. This approach would be doubly effective, in that it would
both improve circumstances for current students and improve perceptions of the university through word-of-mouth from current students to potential ones. This could be especially effective considering that the survey data highlight that students contemplating enrolling at UH Mānoa cited that they may have been swayed to enroll by better funding opportunities. Further, it would be helpful to the “rebranding” mission if UH Mānoa were able to demonstrate trending increases in the percentage of graduate students receiving financial support and in the level of support received.

- Consider granting resident status to non-resident doctoral students for the final years of their enrollment at UH Mānoa. This would be a financial incentive for all graduate students to remain until completion, as well as reducing the cost of tuition waivers on departments and colleges. We believe such actions could reduce graduate student attrition rates.

- Attachment 2 – Spreadsheet of objectives and strategies with costs, barriers and responsible person(s) and/or offices
  - We were not provided this attachment, so some of our suggestions/queries may have already been addressed there.
Ka Hoʻokō Kuleana

The GSO Executive Council supports the general direction of the draft plans from Ka Hoʻokō Kuleana.

Comments & Suggestions:

- Increase/institute cultural competency training for administration, faculty and staff
  - Consider forming a working group of Native Hawaiian faculty and cultural experts, current graduate and undergraduate students, and administrators to develop a concrete, detailed action plan and timeline to execute the objectives outlined under the logic model “Educating at All Levels (Faculty, Staff, Administration)” under Theme 2 of the Ka Hoʻokō Kuleana Action Plans draft. Increasing cultural fluency within the administration, faculty, and staff will produce leadership that may effectively guide this land, sea, and space grant university in a manner that fulfills the responsibility to our surrounding local, national, and international communities, “authentically reflecting this university’s uniqueness as a Native Hawaiian place of learning, a world-class institution” (Ke Au Hou (2012) [link](http://manoa.hawaii.edu/chancellor/NHATF/pdf/NHATF-final.pdf)). The current draft discusses training for faculty and staff, but does not include specific actions for training administration. Including administration in this action plan could improve the quality of our leadership and elevate the cultural identity of this distinct institution.

- Include a plan detailing how students may contribute to making the university a Native Hawaiian place of learning
  - Consider forming a working group of Native Hawaiian faculty and students, current graduate and undergraduate students, and administrators to develop a concrete, detailed action plan and timeline to develop an action plan that will promote the awareness of the university’s uniqueness as a Native Hawaiian place of learning among the student body and provide opportunities for students to contribute to this uniqueness.
Student Engagement, Retention, and Graduation (SERG) Committee

The GSO Executive Council supports the general direction of the draft plans (with reservations) from the SERG Committee.

Concerns/Questions:

- Representation of “students” in this plan is a bit misleading.
  - Many of these wonderful plans, initiatives, and ideas are targeted at undergraduate students or certain segments of undergraduate students, but use language such as “all students.” This makes it confusing when reading the plan because at times it is unclear who the initiative targets, which could cause alarm for certain populations.
  - We recommend minimizing confusion and undue panic by examining language used for “all students,” and truly consider if it pertains to all students (undergraduate, graduate, and special populations). If it is only geared toward a specific population, the specific population should be clearly identified.

- Representation of graduate students is lacking.
  - Graduate students are a central component to Mānoa’s mission as a Research-I Institution. We would not have this prestigious designation without the research and scholarship provided by graduate students, particularly Graduate Assistants (GA’s).
  - As indicated in the SPARC report, graduate students made up 28.3% of the 5,659 incoming UH Mānoa students in Fall 2015, and account for 28% of UH Mānoa’s total student population (18,865 in Fall 2015).
  - We suggest the first sentence of the SERG plan should be changed to: "Every year, several thousand undergraduate and graduate students enter the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa."
  - We recommend proportionate representation of graduate students in this plan, and below have made recommendations for where this committee can proactively explore graduate student engagement, retention, and graduation issues.

- Attrition rates for graduate students are not addressed in this plan.
  - As evidenced in the SPARC plan, graduate student enrollment (applications, enrollment, and yield) have declined at the UH Mānoa.
  - We recommend resources and support be allocated to the Office of Graduate Education to address these findings and challenges.
  - We recommend a sub-committee within SERG be dedicated towards exploring ways to support graduate student retention and graduation.

- Funding opportunities for graduate students are not addressed in the Affordability section.
Approximately 1300 (~25%) graduate students receive assistance in terms of a Graduate Assistantship (GA), with a tuition waiver. Of these students, not all receive assistantships through their department but have to venture outside of their departments and intended areas of study to obtain funding.

As indicated in the SPARC plan, Edvuentures surveyed approximately 500 graduate students (379 enrolling; 99 non-enrolling) in Summer 2015 and found:

- “The area in which non-enrolling students rate UH Mānoa worse in comparison to their choice is affordability. The lowest rating is for availability of financial aid (69%).”
- “Non-enrolling out-of-state students choose to attend another institution due to availability of assistantships/fellowships (35%) or affordability (21%).”
- More than half (54%) choose to attend other out-of-state public institutions.

It seems apparent that there is need for increased staffing to support and execute these initiatives. We recommend the SERG committee encourage the formation of Graduate Assistantships to support these initiatives.

We have found through discussions on the Research Advisory Council and other committees the GSO serves on that there is a need for undergraduate mentoring, which seems to be supported in the SERG plan. We believe graduate students can serve as near-peer mentors to undergraduate students, if provided the opportunity.

Add a need to increase graduate student financial aid opportunities.

We are concerned with the overwhelming underutilization of unspent scholarship monies (the SERG plan indicated it could be as high as $5-6 million dollars through the University of Hawaiʻi Foundation), and have a few questions and recommendations:

- We recommend these monies be analyzed to inform this committee’s decision-making and recommendations. Specifically, we’d like to know who these monies are targeted towards, when are their deadlines, and how do students find out about these opportunities?
- Are there funding opportunities for graduate students available in this pot?
- We recommend improving the STAR Scholarships/Giving Tree search and application system in the following ways:
  - There is a need to include a save button when writing applications,
  - Search features need to be optimized, and
  - Need to add ability to save scholarships for later viewing as students peruse their opportunities (i.e. “liking” scholarships)

Include incoming graduate students in automated eligibility for access to SECE student employment.

We recommend the creation of a support-team to help students with locating scholarships and funding opportunities that may be applicable to them.
Are graduate students able to receive Federal Work Study (FWS)?

- Representation of special and/or marginalized populations within this document is lacking.
  - Mānoa is fortunate to have students from all backgrounds share in this educational experience and has been noted for its high levels of diversity.
  - However, the people who make Mānoa special are not represented in this plan, nor are their engagement or retention issues addressed. These missing populations include, but are not limited to:
    - Graduate students
    - Post-Baccalaureate Unclassified (PBU) students
      - Native Hawaiian students
      - Filipino/a students
      - Pacific Islander students (general and sub-groups)
      - LGBTI students
      - Student-athletes
      - Student veterans and their dependents (one point made about them)
      - Students with disabilities
      - Nontraditional students
      - Student-parents
      - International students
      - First-generation to college students
      - Commuter students
      - Students without a house
      - White males from the continental U.S. (although historically a thriving population, at UH Mānoa this population has been found to be the lowest achieving)
  - We recommend MIRO investigate retention figures for the above populations.
  - We recommend that representatives from Student Affairs be brought onto this committee to share what they are doing to engage and retain students, and to assist with identifying natural collaborations and key target areas.
  - We recommend qualitative data be collected about Mānoa’s special populations to find out their stories and struggles with engaging and persisting at the university.
  - We recommend more support and resources be dedicated to units supporting special populations.

- Concerned with securing buy-in from key stakeholders to execute these initiatives. Especially regarding dealing with “low success” courses.
  - We recommend adding more committee members from Student Affairs and from instructional faculty to secure buy-in and generate ideas.
  - We recommend leveraging similar groups such as the Administrative Procedures Committee (APC) to generate ideas and secure buy-in.
What Mānoa has not done in the past is to set quantifiable goals to be reached, but a commitment in the new Mānoa strategic plan is to have a limited number of measurable goals for each initiative." (page 3)

- While we appreciate the justification for not setting quantifiable goals, we believe that setting such targets would provide clearly understood objectives to work towards implementation.
- We are also concerned with the feasibility and efficacy of the action items. The sub-committee action items do not appear to be data-driven; there is a lack of citing sources of data and a plethora of generalizations and assumptions made about students. Nor do they indicate where support and funding will come from. We value these initiatives and do not want these good ideas to be lost or poorly executed.
- How will we measure progress towards these goals? How will we know we have engaged and retained students because of these plans and initiatives? Especially at the individual action items level. We want to know specifically how it will cause retention to rise.

Affordability: OER Textbooks

- We are in agreement that costs for textbooks are extremely high and we advocate for open resources. We have the following questions:
  - How much money is spent by graduate students on textbooks?
  - Who is in charge of this initiative?

Administrative Hurdles: Parking passes

- The struggle to obtain parking passes was briefly mentioned when discussing registration for transfer students, but this has been a critical issue raised by ASUH and GSO multiple times. As identified in this plan, a late registration time means that students are unable to receive a parking pass, which means they have to park off-campus or find other means of transportation. Paired with other responsibilities students have (e.g., work, family, dependents, etc.), it can cause students to disengage and not want to return to study.
- We recommend beginning a dialogue with Commuter Services to find innovative ways to make obtaining a parking pass more accessible to students of all class standings, especially incoming students.

Administrative Hurdles: In-Hall advising options

- This initiative to bring academic advising options to Exploratory students living in the residence halls raises an important point about students who "cannot make business day appointments for advising due to hectic schedules.”
- However, Mānoa is heavily a commuter campus, with over 75% of students living off-campus, many outside of Honolulu.
- We recommend extending this idea to recognize the hectic schedules and circumstances of our students who are working, living off campus, or have to take care of dependents, and to have all major campus services (i.e. financial aid, records, academic advising units, etc.) extend their business hours to 5:00PM or 6:00PM to provide access and accommodate all students.
Transitional Issues: Counseling
- ASUH and GSO are advocating for House Bill 1703 to increase positions at the Counseling and Student Development Center because we recognize mental health services are pertinent to retention of students, especially during points of transition in a student's educational journey.
  - We recommend the SERG recognize this important need in the plan.

Transitional Issues: Special populations
- All students experience and must negotiate a transition during their academic journey.
  - We recommend investigating transitional issues and developing or recognizing areas of support for students of special populations (mentioned above), especially for nontraditional students, Native Hawaiian students, Filipino/a students, and Pacific Islander students.

Transitional Issues: Career services and exploration
- Job placement for graduate students is an important component to the final years of graduate education; but as tenure-faculty positions decline in institutions of higher education, it is now important for graduate students to look outside of academia for future careers.
  - We recommend adding to encourage the Mānoa Career Center partner with the Office of Graduate Education to provide counseling and resource information for graduate students in their career exploration.

Communication Issues: Improve communications with faculty about student retention
- We are concerned this action-item is just an information relay from the top-down and will not instigate a thoughtful conversation or dialogue with one of the most important stakeholders and allies in improving student retention (for undergraduate and graduate students)–faculty members.
  - We recommend this information be used to have a dialogue with faculty and staff, and from that dialogue this committee should take into consideration the ideas and comments they provide.

Improving Learning: Unmeasurable key area
- The category, “Improving Learning,” is problematic key area. This does not seem measurable or produce action—how does one "improve learning"?

Improving Learning: Low success rate courses
- Finally, students need to pass the classes that are required for their majors if they are to graduate with those majors. We have low success rates in many of the key gateway courses: students may fail the course or they may withdraw or take an incomplete. Anything short of completing the course with a passing grade will affect progress to degree. So the fifth area is improving learning: what can we do to improve student learning, especially in key courses, so that students can progress through their required courses in a timely manner? (page 4, SERG)
  - Based on this description, “improving learning” does not seem to be the goal. Moving students through the major appears to be the objective, perhaps at the expense of actual learning.
- We recommend aligning the strategic plan with the undergraduate Institutional Learning Objectives (ILO’s) to find measurable ways “improve learning.”
  - We recommend adding the low success rate course list in the appendix.
  - We recommend investigating more about low success rate courses, especially gathering more qualitative data to assist in making data-driven decisions.
    - Who teaches these courses? — tenured faculty, lecturers, or TA’s?
    - Who are the students taking these courses?
      - Did they fail/withdraw/take incompletes in all their courses that semester?
      - Were there external factors from the course to impede success?
      - Was there access to tutoring or resources to support learning?
      - What are the class standings of these students?
  - We recommend MIRO run focus groups with students of low success courses and gather qualitative data.
  - We recommend MIRO run focus groups with faculty and teaching assistants of low success courses and gather qualitative data.
  - How will instructor buy-in be obtained?
- Improving Learning: Co-curricular transcript
  - One of the items identified in Appendix C is an idea to credentialed professional development for graduate students which we are interested in, and we wonder if these two initiatives could be combined or at least collaborate together to offer these services to students.
  - We recommend the Mānoa Career Center collaborate with the Office of Graduate Education to develop a system of providing a co-curricular transcript and professional development credential.
- Appendix C: Tuition adjustment incentives for Non-Res/WUE
  - Non-Resident and Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) students represent 47% of currently enrolled students (34%, 13%). There is a significant differential between Resident and Non-Resident/WUE tuition rates, that are often crippling and discouraging to prospective students. And tuition keeps rising annually.
  - Therefore, we understand the desire to support Non-Resident/WUE students, but at this same time this proposal seems counter-intuitive to proposed (and implemented) annual BOR tuition increases that the students continuously fight—this plan seems to imply that the university does not need to be charging such high amounts of tuition, therefore it begs the question, why are we?
    - In addition, if this was implemented, it would be negated by the fact that tuition increases yearly.
  - We do not support the proposal as it is written; however, we want to support these students in having an affordable education. We encourage a scholarship be made specifically for Non-Resident/WUE students who meet the criteria in the plan, and/or it be an automated scholarship such as the Mānoa Opportunity Grant and Second Century Scholarships.
General Comments:

- Add list of definitions and terms. Need to clearly define:
  - Success
  - Engagement
  - Retention
  - Complete
  - Satisfactory progress
  - Optimal progress

- Sub-committee action items seem to be more unit-specific, rather than goals for the institution to follow. *Who is this document written for? Who should follow these instructions?*

- Add New Graduate Student Orientation.

- Use proper Hawaiian diacritical marks throughout this plan.

- We support all current graduate student initiatives and ideas:
  - Electronic submission of theses and dissertations
  - Streamline the application system for graduate students
  - STAR for graduate programs
  - Graduate Student Professional Development Series
  - Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Competition