

# Hawaii Monitor: Who is the University of Hawaii?

By Ian Lind 12/26/2013

The ongoing administrative meltdown in the UH Cancer Center, where alleged mismanagement has prompted a faculty revolt, has revealed a broader problem of crossed lines of authority on the Manoa campus that need to be taken seriously.

The center's faculty recently went through outside channels to appeal directly to the UH Board of Regents to remove the center's director, Michele Carbone, from his post.

This comes after several years of internal conflict and a record 25 formal complaints filed against Carbone by center faculty.

According to the [University of Hawaii Professional Assembly](#), the union representing faculty throughout the UH system, "the number of violations has been substantial and well beyond the experience in any other unit within the UH system."

The union says the office of the Manoa chancellor has had to repeatedly intervene and overrule Carbone in order to resolve grievances.

Meanwhile, Manoa Chancellor Tom Apple — the CEO of the Manoa campus — has reportedly tried on two occasions to remove Carbone from his position. Both attempts failed.

Why in the world are we paying Apple a salary of \$439,000 only to have his authority undermined by others within and outside the university?

That disconnect — the inability of the Chancellor/CEO to make and follow through on management decisions in the face of interference from other quarters — seems to be a deeper issue for the university than mismanagement of the Cancer Center.

Who is running the Manoa campus, if not its chancellor?

It was reported last week that despite the chancellor's attempts to remove Carbone, "the university" continues to back the director.

But just who is "the university"? We don't know, because the statements were published without attribution.

For example, the [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#) reported: "The university is developing a plan to strengthen the Cancer Center under the continuing leadership of Michele Carbone as director," UH said in an emailed statement."

The Star-Advertiser further reported: “The university would not confirm attempts to fire Carbone but said last week that it was concerned about the center's long-term future, calling it one of the most important programs at UH.”

But the vague reference to “the university” fails to attribute these decisions and policies to anyone in the UH system by name or position, making it appear that someone has usurped the chancellor’s management authority and is now avoiding being publicly identified. This makes accountability impossible to achieve.

The persistence of this disembodied reference to “the university” brings to mind a famous story about one of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s early experiences as president of Columbia University, a story which has been told and retold many times in academic circles.

According to one retelling by noted Professor Ithiel De Sola Pool, Eisenhower used the occasion of his first meeting with the faculty to tell them of his plans to benefit the “employees” of the university.

“At the end the Nobel Prize-winning physicist, I.I. Rabi, rose and said: “Mr. President there is just one point: we are not the employees of the university, we are the university.”

The cavalier disregard by “the university” of the unusually strong faculty sentiment against Carbone’s ongoing tenure as director does not bode well for the future.

And this isn’t the first time in recent memory that bureaucratic interference in the management of the Manoa campus has created major headaches for the university.

Remember the “Wonder Blunder,” the now infamous fundraising concert that turned out to be a scam in which the university lost \$200,000?

An investigation by a fact-finding team said it happened, in part, because employees of the UH Athletic Department enjoyed unusual direct access to top “system” level administrators, including the president, apparently allowing them to bypass routine administrative channels, reviews, and safeguards in place on the Manoa campus.

It’s also worth noting that Carbone’s appointment as director of the Cancer Center in 2009 was controversial from the very beginning, and allegedly resulted from a flawed and biased selection process. The problems in the process were detailed in a [strongly-worded resolution](#) adopted by the UH Manoa Faculty Senate in January 2010.

According to the resolution, the selection process was tightly controlled by then-Chancellor Virginia Hinshaw and biased towards Carbone.

The faculty senate said Carbone did not meet the minimum requirement that candidates have five years administrative experience, and was added to the list of finalists to be interviewed even though the members of the selection committee did not vote to include him.

The resolution concluded that “both the perception and the reality of a biased and pre-ordained search process have done irreparable damage to the reputation and the integrity of the University

of Hawaii.”

Given this history, it’s no surprise that cancer center faculty are not encouraged by a “trial balloon,” floated recently, that aimed to have Hinshaw serve as an administrator to work with Carbone. That’s likely to just compound the current problems.

In the wake of the Wonder Blunder scandal, the university was criticized for allowing lines of authority on the Manoa campus to be bypassed or blurred, and for its lack of both administrative transparency and accountability. UH officials—up to and including the Board of Regents—have repeatedly vowed to make improvements on all these fronts.

To date, the handling of the Cancer Center controversy once again calls those commitments into question.