



March 2, 2005

John D. Welty
President
California State University, Fresno
5241 North Maple Avenue
Fresno, CA 93740-8027

Dear President Welty:

At its meeting on February 17-18, 2005, the Commission considered the reports that were prepared by the Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review teams that visited California State University, Fresno on November 19-21, 2003 and October 18-20, 2004. The Commission also had access to the University's institutional presentations for the two reviews and your responses to each of the two team reports, dated February 2, 2004 and January 3, 2005, respectively. The thoroughness of these responses was useful to the Commission and added useful information. Your participation and that of Jeronima Echeverria, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Ken Shipley, Associate Provost; Dianne Dickerson, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies; and Ethelynda E. Harding, Director, Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, in the deliberations of the Commission Panel was appreciated. The conversation deepened the Commission's understanding of the University and its future.

The Capacity and Preparatory Review and the Educational Effectiveness Review were framed during the three-year accreditation process around the institutional theme of "A Learning Community," articulated in the Institutional Proposal. The institution organized its self-review, and especially the focus of the Educational Effectiveness Review, around topics determined to be of importance to institutional learning: Opportunity, Exploration, and Interaction. As noted in the Commission letter of March 3, 2004, the University, following the Capacity and Preparatory Review identified a series of research questions to be addressed as part of the analysis for the Educational Effectiveness Review.

The University is commended for achieving a coherent review process that sustained the goals and outcomes originally identified in the Institutional Proposal. The Educational Effectiveness team praised the University for building a culture dedicated to improvement and institutional learning that was supported by both administrative and academic leadership, and many faculty. Importantly, the Institutional Portfolio prepared for the Capacity and Preparatory Review,

985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100
Alameda, CA 94501
PHONE: 510.748.9001
FAX: 510.748.9797
E-MAIL: wascst@wascsenior.org
INTERNET: www.wascweb.org

CHAIR
John D. Welty
California State University, Fresno

VICE CHAIR
Sherwood G. Lingenfelter
Fuller Theological Seminary

Dede Alpert
Public Member

James R. Appleton
University of Redlands

Lisa Marie Beardsley
Loma Linda University

Mark Bookman
University of Judaism

Barbara Cambridge
*American Association for
Higher Education*

Jerry Dean Campbell
University of Southern California

Kenyon S. Chan
Occidental College

Carter Doran
*Community and Junior Colleges
Commission Representative*

Aimee Dorr
University of California, Los Angeles

Laurence Gould
Public Member

Marvalene Hughes
California State University, Stanislaus

Christina Maslach
University of California, Berkeley

Tomás Morales
*California State Polytechnic
University, Pomona*

Thomas H. Robinson
School's Commission Representative

Beverly P. Ryder
Edison International

Eleanor Dantzer Siebert
Mount St. Mary's College

Mary K. Tetreault
Portland State University

Rose Y. Tseng
University of Hawaii, Hilo

STAFF
Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

Stephanie R. Bangert
Associate Director

Elizabeth Griego
Associate Director

Gregory M. Scott
Associate Director

Richard A. Winn
Assistant Director

Robert R. Benedetti
Adjunct Associate Director

Lily S. Owyang
Adjunct Associate Director

Bill Gong
Finance & Operations Manager

further enhanced and analyzed for the Educational Effectiveness Review, established for the University a foundation for institutional and program self-reflection and evaluation.

The Commission noted that several significant unintended outcomes arose from the review process, as described in the Institutional Presentation for the Educational Effectiveness Review. Also noteworthy are the institutional reflections and insights about how the University is meeting important needs of the external community, and how embedded the value to foster student success and achievement is within the internal campus culture.

While the University experienced some “institutional fatigue” in preparing for the two reviews, both the institutional presentations and the on-site visits demonstrated an authentic value-added benefit of the accreditation process to organizational learning. The Educational Effectiveness team concluded that “the University’s community and regional engagement is exemplary” in an environment where “students love their institution and believe that they are getting a fine education.”

The University has made significant progress since its last comprehensive review, in which the issues of strategic planning, assessment, diversity, and financial resources were noted by the 1993 team as areas for institutional attention and improvement. The Capacity and Preparatory Review team found the institution seriously engaged in a strategic planning process, and commended the University for integrating the planning framework effectively into the learning themes identified in the Institutional Proposal. The campus is committed to a culture of assessment, and the Educational Effectiveness team was able to engage both the evidence of assessment results and faculty in discussions about the significance of what the institution was learning about student achievement and teaching and learning effectiveness. The University is to be commended for developing the Expo as a part of the Educational Effectiveness Review; for it seemed to serve the team and the University well.

The Commission acknowledges the strong evidence of the University’s fulfillment of its mission and the Core Commitments to both Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness. The University has, through effective allocation and management of resources, developed durable institutional capacity upon which continuous improvement of educational programs and student learning can be sustained. The University is congratulated for demonstrating an emerging culture of learning where faculty are at the heart of institutional analysis and strategies for improvement.

The Commission endorses the recommendations made by the Educational Effectiveness team for the University to consider, as well as those recommendations made by the institution in its presentation. In addition, The Commission highlighted several issues for University attention:

University Aspirations within the Higher Education Community. The University has used the accreditation process to conduct broad-based discussions about its mission and

strategic direction. The campus plays a critical role in the community, and the diversity and educational goals of its students appropriately shape institutional goals and planning. While the review process provided a venue for exploring themes and institutional goals, the Educational Effectiveness team noted in its report that “the University should more fully articulate the rationale and goal for shifting to a greater emphasis on research, scholarship, and creative activity, keeping in mind its stated mission and purposes.” The emerging strength of the University, its support from the larger community and Fresno and beyond, and the significant influx of new faculty, can be drivers to expand the horizon of the University to seek national recognition. The team additionally urged the University to “not consider that it has reached its potential for regional excellence...it should continually reinforce its commitment to improving the human condition in the Valley through opportunity, educational excellence, and applied research.”

The Commission encourages the University to review its mission in light of these considerations so that the University can more explicitly define its mission with respect to aspirations and “place” in the higher education community. As the University defines, or redefines, its role and place, the Commission urges that the current attention to student learning and to community support not be lost. As further discussed below, there is also a need to ensure alignment of resources and evaluation criteria for faculty with these goals, even as increased emphasis is placed on research.

Developing an Academic Plan. The Commission commends the University for the investment in, and support of, a talented and committed faculty and academic administration. With strong and engaged leadership in place at the University, the Educational Effectiveness team recommended that the institution now needs to develop an academic strategic plan around which faculty development and the assessment of student learning can be based. The team noted the creative and interactive ways that faculty were involved in the analysis of researchable questions about educational effectiveness, including the careful and thorough presentation of educational effectiveness indicators. Data collection and analysis, and the engagement of faculty around these indicators, will need to be continued and integrated into the priorities set by the academic planning process. While the university has worked hard on improving retention and graduation rates, the academic plan should include continuing attention to these issues, especially differential rates of retention and graduation for different student cohorts. Analysis of disaggregated data should be a part of the processes used to develop and evaluate the success of the academic plan.

Expectations for Faculty. As acknowledged by the Commission in its March 3, 2004 letter and underscored here, faculty participation in the gathering of data and evidence, and in the analysis and study of those data sets, was impressive. The Commission remains concerned about the team finding of a lack of clarity among faculty about expectations for research in an environment where teaching is the premier value for student success. There are different models of research and scholarship, and the University needs to assess how to keep vital its attention to student learning and effective pedagogy, while supporting creative research and

scholarship. The University's emphasis on interdisciplinary research of importance to the region holds the promise of facilitating faculty research at an institution with a heavy teaching load. In addition to encouraging departments to take a collaborative approach to teaching, research, and service, agreement with regard to each faculty member's emphasis could contribute to faculty and institutional success. These issues will need to be addressed as the University develops its academic plan and engages in assessing its mission.

In addition, the Commission noted in the team report that 55 percent of the University's classes may now be taught by adjunct faculty. This is a significant shift over the past decade and imposes a significant set of responsibilities on the University to work with adjunct faculty to understand the learning-centered processes now being established in the University. In light of the fact that these faculty are now carrying the bulk of University instruction, evaluation processes of student learning and faculty effectiveness are vitally important, as are programs for adjunct faculty development.

Strengthening General Education and University-wide Assessment. The Commission was provided evidence in the institutional presentations and team reports that the University had demonstrated good progress on general education outcomes assessment. The Educational Effectiveness team, however, noted that this assessment is still uneven and not consistently aligned with the regular program review process. Achievement of the University's general education outcomes is critical to the success of Fresno graduates. The University should not be satisfied with a moderately effective program and should strengthen assessment of the effectiveness of both general education courses and the program as a whole for students.

The Educational Effectiveness team noted that a substantial number of departments have engaged in assessment effectively and begun to use learning results to make program and course improvements. Other departments have not yet begun or are not as far along. To assure the consistency of graduates achieving the University's and each department's stated learning outcomes, it is the responsibility of each program and/or department to demonstrate that these outcomes are being achieved.

The Commission commends the University for its careful analysis of the program as presented in Appendix A of the institution's Educational Effectiveness report, where a number of specific recommendations were presented by the task force charged with the study of program effectiveness. Clearly, the data accumulated and analysis conducted enabled faculty to develop a work plan focused on the improvement of student learning and student achievement. Implementation of that work plan is urged.

In summary, the Commission commends the University as a mature institution deeply committed to student learning. The Capacity and Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness reviews provided the campus with an opportunity to explore areas self-identified for improvement.

The Commission acted to:

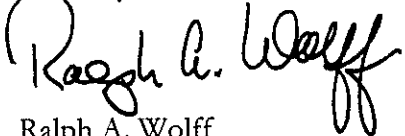
1. Reaffirm the Accreditation of California State University, Fresno.
2. Schedule the Proposal for the two-stage comprehensive review to be due on May 15, 2011. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review in fall 2013, and the Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2014.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California State University, Fresno has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the multistage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the University is expected to continue its progress and be prepared to respond as expectations of institutional performance, especially with respect to Educational Effectiveness and student learning, further develop under the application of the Standards of Accreditation.

In accordance with Commission policy, we request that you send a copy of this letter to Chancellor Charles Reed.

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

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

Cc: Ethelynda Harding
Members of the team

