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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

February 28, 2011

F. King Alexander
President
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Boulevard
Long Beach, CA 90840-0115

Dear President Alexander:

At its meeting February 16-18, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that visited California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) on October 6-8, 2010. The Commission also had access to the visiting team's Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) report, CSULB's Institutional Proposal, and the Commission's 2009 action letter following the CPR visit. The panel would like to thank you, Professor of History and Accreditation Liaison Officer David Hood, and Vice President of Student Services Douglas Robinson for your contributions to the Commission's deliberations. Your comments regarding future directions for the University were most helpful.

In its Institutional Proposal, CSULB set forth three themes or "Core Commitments" that would be the organizing principles for inquiry at both CPR and EER stages of the review: "Organizing for Effectiveness," "Staffing for Effectiveness," and "Assessing Student Success." These themes were chosen partly in response to recommendations from the Commission's 2002 action letter and partly because the University considered them central to its own mission.

The CPR team found that the University's report provided comprehensive information on these themes and commended the University's progress. The team also noted areas for improvement and recommended the following: 1) create a plan for promoting diversity at staff and administrative levels; 2) articulate and assess expectations for student learning using direct methods; 3) widen the circle of communication and governance on campus to include voices that are currently silent; 4) address student concerns about budget cuts and costs of attendance; and 5) ensure that the University is developing a culture of evidence rather than a culture of data.

The EER team that visited in fall 2010 found the University had made significant progress over the previous 18 months on both Core Commitments and the team's recommendations from 2009. Despite a volatile political and economic climate, the University has survived and even thrived under wise and steady leadership. The Commission would like to join the team in commending the University for the development of a highly consultative planning and budget process; the rapid spread of assessment practices; a streamlined program review process; the campus's new

faculty and staff diversity plan; extensive evidence of collection and use of data to support decision-making; and not least of all, CSULB's strong retention and graduation rates. The commission noted that while there is still a gap between overall success rates and those of low-income and under-represented students, CSULB shows some of the strongest graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients and under-represented students in the CSU system and compares well to national peer institutions.

The Commission urged the University to take full advantage of the EER team report, which it found exceptionally well written, well documented, and full of insightful observations. The EER team made a number of recommendations, calling on CSULB to 1) demonstrate that students are achieving explicit learning expectations; 2) broaden the definition of student success to include more qualitative elements; 3) develop budget strategies for the long term; 4) demonstrate to campus constituencies that they have been heard and their feedback acted upon, thus closing the feedback loop; and 5) continue to build an environment that supports CSULB's mission, allowing individual units and members to see how their efforts contribute to the whole.

The Commission endorses the team's recommendations and wishes to draw particular attention to the following issues.

Assessment and Expectations for Learning. With regard to assessment, the EER team found substantial improvements in capacity and process, along with markedly higher rates of participation and numerous examples of ways in which findings had been used to improve courses and the student experience. The team was delighted to note "progress toward building a culture infused with curiosity about student learning". The University is urged to continue to support assessment at course and program levels, in general education, and in student services. The University's inquiry-based approach to program review is also promising and should continue to receive support.

In two areas, significant challenges remain. First, the development and implementation of direct methods of learning assessment needs to continue and become the *sine qua non* of good practice in all programs and units across the University. Second, at both graduate and undergraduate levels, the University needs to map and assess institutional outcomes, in order to document the extent to which students have achieved what is expected of CSULB graduates through all the dimensions of their University experience, including those beyond the classroom. Third, the University must set clear, broadly promulgated targets or benchmarks for the level or standard of learning that CSULB graduates are expected to achieve, just as it has done for retention and graduation. The University will then need to document the extent to which students are actually meeting those standards and make that information publicly available. Finally, the quality of student learning must become an integral part of the CSULB definition of "student success," since degree completion without high quality learning is a hollow success. If CSULB can define expectations and link them to other measures of "student success," it will be well positioned to respond to anticipated public policy demands, to speak in persuasive terms about its "highly valued degrees" and to serve as a national model. Ultimately, it is not just results but the *quality* of results that matters. (CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.6)

Financial Planning for the Long-Term. After reviewing steps that were taken in 2009-2010 to deal with a \$58 million budget reduction and complimenting the University on its ability to manage a difficult situation, the team report states: “Based on a review of the campus’s financial statement, campus expenditures remain higher than operating revenue, meaning the campus is relying in the short run on campus reserves, one-time savings, and possibly transfers from the Foundation. This is a reasonable short-term strategy but it should continue to be closely monitored”. The report goes on to note that more severe challenges may loom in 2011-2012 and recommends longer-term financial planning.

Developments in the state since the EER visit have further threatened the financial position of the CSU system. The Commission agrees with the team that longer-term financial planning is needed. While this is clearly something that University leadership is working on, more radical steps may be necessary than the ones mentioned during the conversation with the panel. The commission suggests that as planning goes forward, the University focus on improvement of educational outcomes as a strategic priority, ensuring that when reductions in spending are made, areas critical to educational outcomes are spared. The clear campus-wide consensus on priorities – student success, instruction, and research infrastructure – provides an appropriate starting point for financial planning. In addition, the University has promising practices in place that it can build on in this effort, e.g., the model that the University has developed for integrating the budget process with strategic planning, and new vehicles for communication and consultation with the campus community. The MOU that results from formal program review can also become a mechanism for connecting assessment findings and program review to planning and budgeting. The University should make full use of these strengths as it formulates and implements long-term financial plans. (CFRs 3.5, 3.8, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)

Maintaining and Strengthening Campus Culture. The EER team report describes the CSULB culture as based on “student success, academic freedom, respect, appreciation, inclusiveness, engagement, equity, modeling, and academic quality”. That culture has been strengthened by the new processes for communication, consultation, and transparency that the University developed in response to the System’s budget crisis. This is a remarkable achievement. The processes that were introduced should be sustained as the University implements its diversity plan, administers its survey of campus climate, invites marginalized voices to join the conversation, connects “success” more closely with academic achievement, struggles with finances, and takes other difficult but necessary steps. At the same time, as the team emphasized, it will be essential not only to reach out to the campus community, but also to demonstrate responsiveness to the community’s feedback, thus closing the loop and reinforcing for all members of the community the value of their participation at a time of increasing workloads. (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, 3.11, 4.1, 4.4, 4.8)

The Commission acted to:

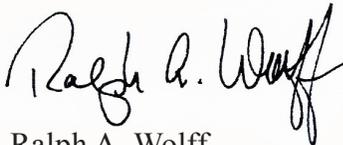
- 1) Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of California State University, Long Beach.

- 2) Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2019 and Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2021. The Institutional Report will be due twelve weeks prior to each visit.
- 3) Request an Interim Report due on November 1, 2015, to focus on the issues raised in this action letter, i.e., assessment, financial planning, and campus culture, and the major recommendations of the Educational Effectiveness Review team report.
- 4) Proceed with the Special Visit on the EdD program, to be held during Fall 2012, pursuant to the Commission's action letter of July 27, 2007.

In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to Chancellor Charles Reed and the chair of the CSU Board of Trustees in one week. It is the Commission's expectation that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the University to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the University's response to the specific issues identified in them.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the University undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring public accountability, and we are grateful for your continued support of our process. 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

RAW/BW/cf

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
David Hood, ALO
Charles Reed, Chancellor of the CSU
Herbert L. Carter, Chair of the CSU Board of Trustees
Members of the EER team
Barbara Wright, Vice President, WASC