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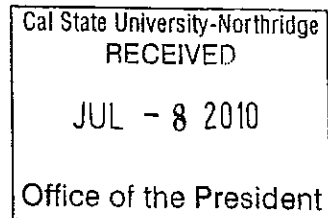
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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolfe

June 30, 2010

Jolene Koester
President
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330



Dear President Koester:

At its meeting on June 16-18, 2010, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to California State University, Northridge (CSUN) on February 3-5, 2010. The Commission also reviewed the Capacity and Preparatory report submitted by the university prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues: Harry Hekkenbrand, Provost/VPAA; Elizabeth Say, Dean of the College of Humanities; Michael Neubauer, Director of Liberal Studies; and Cynthia Rawitch, ALO. Your observations were very helpful.

CSUN's Institutional Proposal outlined three themes for the Capacity and Preparatory Review: student success through engagement and learning; faculty and staff support for university success; and learning as an institution.

The Commission commended the vision, transparency, and openness of the executive leadership; the short-and long-range planning embedded in the university culture; the shared knowledge and consultative decision making on campus; the strong campus commitment to students and their success; the competent and energetic institutional research team; improvements in information technology and student advising; and strong work in the assessment of learning outcomes.

The Commission likewise endorsed the recommendations of the CPR team and wished to emphasize the following areas for continued attention and development:

Student Support. Certain areas of student support will need to be protected during this period of state budget pressures. As noted in the team report, "budget pressures will compress the schedule at the very moment that timely graduation is becoming more important." Transfer students also need advising and a quality student experience comparable to that of the first-year students. CSUN is encouraged to continue "aggressively using available resources and processes to facilitate access to courses such that students can get the courses they need to progress," and to assess the transfer student experience. (CFRs 2.11-2.14)

Graduation and Retention Rates. While the team noted in the first theme a shift in emphasis from retention and graduation rates to student learning, the University's commitment to increasing retention and graduation rates is also evident. Despite this emphasis, CSUN's six-year graduation rates remain below CSU norms and its one-year retention rate has dropped significantly. While work has been done on the former, the team did not detect "much concern or awareness" of the latter by the faculty and lower-level administrators. It is expected that by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) visit, CSUN will have up-to-date data (aggregated and disaggregated) regarding graduation/retention rates; will have made progress in improving the six-year graduation rate; and will have identified the reasons for the drop in retention rates and developed and implemented compensating strategies to reverse its direction. (CFRs 2.10, 4.5)

Alignment of Institutional and Financial Planning. Although CSUN has demonstrated that both short- and long-range planning are embedded in its culture, there are two areas of alignment between institutional and financial planning that need attention: information technology systems and advancement. The campus is encouraged to "continue its evaluation of the appropriate organizational balance between centralized and decentralized information system services" – a decision that will have both budgetary and student success implications – and to further develop the advancement function, including fundraising, alumni relations, portfolio and planned giving, branding and communication. (CFRs 4.2, 4.3)

As the University moves forward to the Educational Effectiveness Review, it will be important to review the research questions identified in the original Proposal and develop an effective design for the deeper level of inquiry expected for the EER around student and organizational learning, as well as the other issues identified in the Proposal. There are many resources available within the University to support the implementation of the Proposal research questions such as the University's own institutional research team and many faculty with strong research design expertise expertise.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of California State University, Northridge.
2. Proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review in fall 2011. The Institutional Report is due 12 weeks prior to the scheduled visit
3. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the issues raised in this action letter and to the major recommendations of the CPR team report into its Educational Effectiveness Review report. You may include this analysis in an appendix to your Educational Effectiveness report or incorporate it into the report.

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. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to

promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution'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 and Executive Director

RW/dh

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
Cynthia Rawitch, ALO
Herbert L. Carter, Board Chair
Charles Reed, Chancellor
Members of the CPR team
Diane Harvey, Associate Director, WASC