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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolff

June 24, 2010

Warren J. Baker
President
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0006

Dear President Baker:

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 Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (CPSUSLO) on February 10-12, 2010. The Commission also reviewed the Capacity and Preparatory report submitted by CPSUSLO prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you, David Conn, Erling Smith, and Rachel Henry. Your observations were very helpful.

CPSUSLO's institutional proposal outlined an overarching theme of the institution's polytechnic identity, with three foci for the Capacity and Preparatory Review: learning by doing, the teacher scholar model, and integration and student learning.

The Commission commended CPSUSLO for its continued international reputation for excellence in such applied fields as agriculture, architecture, and engineering. It also noted the positive way in which the University has addressed the current financial challenges through strong fundraising efforts and by procuring significant external research grants. The learning-by-doing philosophy that has been a central part of the institution's pedagogy from its founding continues to provide a foundation for almost everything undertaken on campus. Since the last WASC visit in 2000, university-wide learning outcomes have been developed, all academic programs have student learning outcomes, and there is a growing commitment to making student learning a top priority. The newly founded inclusive excellence initiative has promise for finding solutions to longstanding challenges of bringing greater student and faculty diversity to campus. While Commission practice avoids commending individuals by name, an exception is made in acknowledging the outstanding and unprecedented 30-year leadership you have provided as president of CPSUSLO. You have helped create an institution renowned for its academic excellence and for the reputation of its faculty and graduates.

The Commission is aware that there will be a transition between the completion of your tenure and the appointment of a permanent president. Much of the team's CPR report revolved around the assumption that a new president would be in place during the period between the CPR and EER, so the campus will need to take this into consideration as the Commission's and team's recommendations are implemented.

That noted, the Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and major recommendations of the CPR team, and wished to emphasize the following areas for continued attention and development:

Polytechnic Identity. As noted above, CPSUSLO chose "Our Polytechnic Identity" as the overarching theme for the WASC review. In trying to define the kind of institution they would like to become, study groups on campus envisioned a *comprehensive polytechnic*

university. All of the institutions identified by CPSUSLO as those to be emulated, however, are research institutions, which poses a problem that impacts not only strategic planning and budget issues, but campus morale. The California Master Plan designates the California State University (CSU) system as focused on undergraduate education, with a few graduate degrees. This leaves CPSUSLO somewhere between these two models, as a state polytechnic university within CSU. Among faculty groups studying CPSUSLO's identity, the WASC team found a sense of powerlessness to do anything about this dilemma. As they discovered,

... members of the working group responsible for this theme expressed considerable doubt as to the institution's ability to meet the identified challenges [of their identity]... As such, members of this working group...stated emphatically that its institutional aspirations were dependent on the quality of the next University leaders... [T]his working group lacked the sense of empowerment and self-efficacy needed to move their agenda forward...

The team found that some of this feeling was "associated with the members' lack of clarity about the role faculty governance plays in institutional strategic planning." The Commission urges the new leaders of CPSUSLO to identify more clearly the aspirational goals of the institution, and the role of faculty in helping to shape possible changes in the institution's identity. Because of the consequences for future planning, a clearer identity for CPSUSLO needs to be in place by the time of the EER, either affirming the current identity or establishing new directions. (CFRs 1.1, 3.8, 3.11, 4.1, 4.6)

Identification of Leadership Structures. The Commission supported the team's finding that several areas could benefit from more clearly defined leadership structures. Because of your impending departure, followed by the departure of the provost in another year or two, the Commission urges that faculty leadership within the overall governance structure of CPSUSLO be better defined and empowered to take on leadership roles in a number of areas during this transition period and into the future, as a new president is hired. For example, defined leadership of educational assessment throughout the university is needed, now that student learning outcomes have been so well developed. In particular, leadership is needed to find ways to measure the educational effectiveness of the learning-by-doing pedagogy. The teacher scholar model also needs further definition by the time of the EER visit. The theme of integration and student learning would likewise benefit from a leadership structure, as the team discovered that "everyone is waiting for someone else to take the initiative to take this effort forward." The Commission urges the new president to provide direction in putting in place the leadership structures - both faculty and administrative - needed to implement these themes. (CFRs 3.8, 3.11)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
2. Reschedule the Educational Effectiveness Review to spring 2012. The Institutional Report is due 12 weeks prior to the scheduled visit. The Commission extended the time of the visit by one semester to allow the University more time to address the issues noted above and to settle leadership issues.
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 the chair of the CSU Board of Trustees and to Chancellor Charles Reed 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/ro

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
W. David Conn, ALO
Herbert L. Carter, CSU Board Chair
Charles Reed, Chancellor, California State University
Members of the CPR team
Richard Osborn