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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 5, 2011

Dianne Harrison
President
California State University, Monterey Bay
100 Campus Center
Seaside, CA 93955-8001

Dear President Harrison:

At its meeting June 22-24, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) March 16-18, 2011. The Commission also reviewed the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by CSU Monterey Bay prior to the visit and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2009. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues, Provost Kathryn Cruz-Uribe, and Director of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Becky Rosenberg. Your comments were helpful.

CSU Monterey Bay's ambitious Institutional Proposal outlined a hybrid approach to the accreditation review, with planning as the focus of the Capacity and Preparatory Review and three themes (student success, the value of the CSUMB academic model, and quality in teaching and learning) as the foci for the Educational Effectiveness Review. Despite various time and resource constraints that resulted in a less comprehensive study than originally conceived, the team found that "the institution has worked diligently to meet the stated activities" and "produced a commendable review and report."

The Commission's action letter of March 3, 2010 highlighted two major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: (1) strengthening feedback loops that are an essential part of the quality assurance processes at CSUMB and (2) improving retention and graduation rates. The Commission notes that CSUMB provided several examples of how it had "closed the loop" in areas that it was assessing and that the team observed other such examples during the visit. Persistent challenges concerning retention and graduation were a major focus of the EER and, as noted below, recent work has been far-reaching and is starting to yield positive results.

The Commission commends the dynamism, adaptation, and planning that have taken place during this comprehensive review. As noted by the team, the University has improved processes and plans since the CPR visit, increased student retention, and aligned resources with strategic goals and priorities, even in a challenging economic environment.

The Commission endorses the commendations and the four recommendations of the EER team, which pertain to (1) a culture of evidence and data-driven decision making, (2) staff training and development, (3) student learning outcomes and rubrics for assessment, and (4) academic rigor. The Commission wishes to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

Collecting, Disseminating and Using Data. As highlighted in the team report, “faculty and staff described ... an increasing commitment to data-driven decision making.” The Commission encourages the use of direct evidence of student learning and multiple measures of learning to inform decisions about academic offerings. The Commission also encourages continued alignment of assessment and data-driven decision making in support of both program review and CSUMB’s plans to use “data to improve both programs and services as part of continuous improvement.” (CFRs 2.10, 3.7, 4.3, 4.4)

Assessing New Initiatives. CSUMB has engaged in multiple initiatives during this review cycle, including efforts to improve retention and graduation, a revised general education model, and a new advising model. In the area of retention and graduation, the University “was losing students generally across the student body” and it set ambitious goals to improve graduation rates by 2015. Through a concerted effort to focus on “super practical problems” that impede persistence, CSUMB has seen a significant increase in the freshmen retention rate over the last two years. This improvement suggests that some of the student success initiatives may be effective; however, the team reported that “the campus is unsure which initiatives have had the most impact.” Understanding that many of these initiatives are too new to assess or are still in the pilot stage, the Commission urges CSUMB to evaluate which approaches are working and which are not so that refinements can be made and resources allocated to the most effective approaches. The Commission encourages CSUMB to evaluate also the effectiveness of other new initiatives to determine which should continue to be supported and resourced. (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 3.4, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)

Teaching and Learning in Capstone Courses. The Commission acknowledges that one of the key elements of the CSUMB academic model is the capstone course that all graduating students complete and it commends CSUMB for adhering to this “best practice.” As noted in the team report, the capstone is considered a “defining feature” of a CSUMB education. Given the importance of the capstone as the culminating experience for the student and the primary vehicle for assessing student learning at the undergraduate level, the University devoted considerable effort in its EER to researching the effectiveness of this experience. The Commission encourages CSU Monterey Bay to continue its comparative study of the various capstone models on campus, with a particular focus on the assessment of student learning conducted under each of them. The results of this study will inform CSUMB’s search for a solution to its current dilemma: holding the capstone as a “defining feature” of a CSUMB education while scaling the capstone model to serve a growing student population, all within the constraints of limited resources. Work also remains in defining faculty roles and responsibilities in teaching and mentoring capstone students, better preparing students for the capstone experience, aligning the capstone experiences with CSUMB’s core values and academic goals, and examining the overall effectiveness of capstone courses. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 3.4, 4.7)

Defining and Embedding Academic Rigor. CSUMB originally intended to address the issue of academic rigor in its discussion of quality in teaching and learning, but had to set it aside in the interests of more pressing issues. As noted by the team, “the campus is committed to addressing the topic in an intentional and focused manner.” The Commission concurs with the team’s recommendation that after establishing a working definition of academic rigor, CSUMB “ensure that rigor is embedded in program planning and review processes as well as teaching and learning.” (CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 4.4, 4.7)

Addressing Ongoing State Funding Challenges. The following observation should not be construed as in any way reflecting on either CSUMB’s Educational Effectiveness Review or the University’s leadership. The Commission noted a sharp decline in the financial resources provided by the State of California, and concluded that the state budget will have both short- and long-term impacts on the California State University campuses. The Commission was especially concerned about the potential consequences of funding reductions on educational programs and student learning, and the ability of the CSU campuses to sustain academic quality. CSUMB is advised to manage these reductions in such a way that educational effectiveness remains a priority, and to report on the ways in which it is addressing this challenge in its next interaction with WASC. (CFRs 3.5, 4.1-4.3)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

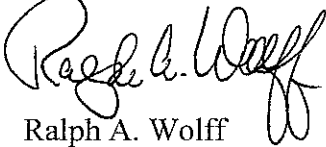
1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of California State University, Monterey Bay.
2. Schedule CSUMB’s next comprehensive review visit for spring 2019. As you know, the Commission is in the process of considering major revisions to the current three-stage institutional review process. It expects these revisions to be adopted by June 2012 and implemented during the following two years. Once the revised process is adopted, WASC staff will communicate with you and your ALO to explain the impact of any changes on your next comprehensive review and on the interactions you may have with WASC before that review.
3. Request an Interim Report to be submitted by March 1, 2014, addressing the areas cited in this action letter and in the team report, especially progress in data collection, analysis and use; improving retention and graduation rates and assessing the various initiatives to support students’ completion; continuing improvements to assessment processes and program review; defining academic rigor; and addressing the financial challenges arising from the state budget crisis.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California State University, Monterey Bay has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

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

RW/dh

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Kathryn Cruz-Uribe, ALO
Charles Reed, Chancellor, CSU
Herbert L. Carter, Board Chair, CSU
Members of the EER team
Diane Harvey, Vice President, WASC