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PRESIDENT  
Ralph A. Wolff

March 8, 2012

Horace Mitchell  
President  
California State University, Bakersfield  
9001 Stockdale Highway  
Bakersfield, CA 93311-1022

Dear President Mitchell:

At its meeting February 22-24, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted a visit to California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB) November 16-18, 2011. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by CSUB prior to the visit, the institution's January 27, 2012 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in the fall of 2009. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and Provost Soraya Coley. Your comments were helpful.

CSUB's institutional proposal outlined two themes for this comprehensive review: (1) Community Engagement (later redefined as Student Success) and (2) Student Learning. The Commission was pleased with the thoroughness of the CSUB self-review and the progress made in these vital areas. The University's identification of these two core areas for study and improvement, and the excellent analysis and plans that resulted, are significant indicators of CSUB's commitment to quality and its deep understanding of key policy concerns.

The Commission's March 2010 action letter following the CPR visit highlighted three major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: (1) assessment of student learning, (2) faculty development and support, and (3) student success. The Commission noted that progress had been made on each of these issues by the time of the EER. Specifically, the University has put in place an array of assessment protocols and program review processes, designed plans for faculty and staff development (including training for department chairs), and implemented initiatives and programs in support of student success.

CSUB is to be commended for its engagement with the entire comprehensive review process. The Commission was pleased with the University's efforts in gathering data and evidence in support of the EER. Of particular note was the visiting team's observation that "the infrastructure and support for faculty assessment efforts are strong, and [the] level of faculty engagement is fairly high." Likewise, the Commission shared the team's satisfaction with CSUB's commitment and recent initiatives "to promote, support, and assess student success."

The Commission endorsed the commendations and recommendations of the EER team and wished to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

**Expanding and refining assessment of student learning.** As highlighted in the team report, the University has set "processes in place to infuse student learning goals across

academic and co-curricular programs.” However, the Commission was concerned that evidence of progress on program-level assessment was uneven across departments and that “the University is only at the preliminary stages of university-level learning outcomes assessment.” It is important that efforts in assessment and program review (including alignment with university student learning outcomes) be sustained over time in order to yield evidence to inform needed improvements. Specifically, CSUB now needs to utilize already established indicators that will enable it to demonstrate that students are achieving intended learning outcomes, especially at the university level; to bolster support among all units by following through on continuous quality improvement initiatives, including plans that result in actionable items; and to continue strengthening and refining program review processes, including adherence to established cycles of review. The Commission also recognizes that more work remains in the assessment of student learning at the graduate level and expects CSUB to make progress in this regard. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3-2.7, 2.11, 4.4, and 4.6)

**Improving graduation and retention rates.** The University clearly views student success as the responsibility of the entire CSUB community, and consequently has developed a plethora of programs and processes to improve graduation and retention rates. In addition, CSUB has begun to gather important information and data in order to determine the effectiveness of its efforts. Given the University’s relatively low graduation rates in comparison to other CSU campuses, real progress on increasing degree completion must continue to be a high priority. Ongoing attention is needed to monitor retention efforts at both undergraduate and graduate levels, to conduct further analyses of attrition patterns (including those of transfer students and other subpopulations) in order to inform further refinements, and to sustain initiatives focused on this vital concern. (CFRs 2.10-2.14, 4.3, and 4.5-4.6)

**Implementing strategic planning.** The Commission recognizes that CSUB has made progress in ensuring that mission, vision, strategic plans and initiatives are aligned and operationalized into an action plan that guides the setting of priorities and allocation of resources. The recent linking of strategic planning activities with the institution’s budget planning process, and the combining of two standing committees charged with these areas are positive changes. The University should now move to establish metrics for evaluating completion of strategic planning initiatives, especially in a time of continuing economic stresses that may tend to undermine these plans. (CFRs 4.1-4.3 and 4.8)

**Addressing ongoing state funding challenges.** While in no way a reflection on either CSUB’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. Clearly, 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. CSUB 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, Bakersfield.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the off-site review in fall 2019 and the visit tentatively scheduled for spring 2020.

3. Request an Interim Report in fall 2015 on the issues cited in the EER report: (1) assessment of student learning, (2) graduation and retention, (3) strategic planning, and (4) update on budgets and plans in view of declining state funding. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California State University, Bakersfield, 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 to 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/kb

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair  
Curt Guaglianone, ALO  
Herbert L. Carter, CSU Board Chair  
Charles Reed, CSU Chancellor  
Members of the EER team  
Barbara Gross Davis/Keith Bell