



July 17, 2007

Alexander Gonzalez
President
California State University, Sacramento
6000 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95819-6016

Dear President Gonzalez:

At its meeting on June 20-22, 2007, the Commission considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review team that conducted the visit to California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) on March 12-14, 2007. The Commission also had access to the Capacity and Preparatory Report (CPR) prepared by the University prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you; Mike Lee, Associate Vice President and Dean of Academic Programs; Jackie Donath, Professor and Department Chair of Humanities and Chair of the CSUS Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) Steering Committee; Joseph Sheley, Provost and Academic Vice President; and Val Smith, Professor of Communication Studies and Chair of the CSUS CPR Steering Committee. Your comments were helpful to the Commission, especially in understanding the context for the visit and learning about your plans for the upcoming Educational Effectiveness Review.

The CSUS Capacity and Preparatory Report reflected the work of many members of the campus community, including faculty, administrators, and staff. As noted by the visiting team, the WASC process appears to have been a valuable instrument for focusing attention on CSUS's capacity and the important themes selected for special emphasis – Academic Programs, Campus Life, and Community Engagement.

From its review of the team report and institutional materials, the Commission noted several areas for commendation. The University has been successful in enhancing its image and its connection to the community it serves. Institutional planning initiatives such as Destination 2010 and the new Strategic Planning Council are evidence of an emerging institutional transformation. The recent collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs holds great promise to promote student success. With many new programs to support students already in place because of this collaboration, the dialogue between the faculty and student services is

985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100
Alameda, CA 94501
PHONE: 510.748.9001
FAX: 510.748.9797
E-MAIL: wascst@wascsenior.org
INTERNET: www.wascweb.org

CHAIR
John D. Welty
California State University, Fresno

VICE CHAIR
Laura Trombley
Pitzer College

Dede Alpert
Public Member

Mark Bookman
University of Judaism

W. Bernard Bowler
Public Member

Barbara Cambridge
Carnegie Academy and N.C.T.E.

Jerry Dean Campbell
Claremont School of Theology

Anna DiStefano
Fielding Graduate University

James Donahue
Graduate Theological Union

Aimée Dorr
University of California, Los Angeles

John Eshelman
Seattle University

John Fitzpatrick
Schools Commission Representative

Laurence Gould
Public Member

James E. Lyons, Sr.
*California State University,
Dominguez Hills*

Christina Maslach
University of California, Berkeley

Horace Mitchell
*California State University,
Bakersfield*

Tomás Morales
*California State Polytechnic
University, Pomona*

Martha G. Romero
*Community and Junior Colleges
Commission Representative*

Eleanor Dantzer Siebert
Mount St. Mary's College

Sue Wesselkamper
Chaminade University of Honolulu

Michael Whyte
Azusa Pacific University

STAFF
Ralph A. Wolf
President and Executive Director

Therese A. Cannon
Associate Director

Neil Hoffman
Associate Director

Richard A. Winn
Associate Director

Barbara Wright
Associate Director

Christie Jones
*Assistant Director for Research
and Substantive Change*

Lee West
*Assistant Director for
Commission Support*

Robert R. Benedetti
Adjunct Associate Director

Richard C. Giardina
Adjunct Associate Director

Bill Gong
Finance & Operations Manager

becoming part of the culture at CSUS. The campus has achieved a strong consensus about “student learning as a comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development.” Having created strong linkages between the campus and the Sacramento community, the University is promoting civic engagement through a number of effective programs designed to build leadership and to encourage commitment to community. Many improvements to the campus facilities are serving the students well and have made the campus more welcoming for students and visitors. Finally, the ready availability of useful data and the implementation of good practices in the business operations have enhanced the University’s capacity for planning and reporting.

CSUS has grown substantially since the last comprehensive review. The University has developed several successful and effective off-campus and online programs. It has experienced significant leadership change in the top administrative posts, including the presidency, and has a large proportion of new faculty members. CSUS is clearly an institution undergoing an important transformation as it seeks to become a destination campus and to build even deeper connections with the communities it serves.

The Commission endorsed the findings and recommendations of the team and called attention to the following key areas as the University prepares for its Educational Effectiveness Review (EER):

Assessment of Student Learning. CSUS’s last comprehensive review, conducted in 1996-97, used an experimental model that focused on educational effectiveness. In the action letter granting CSUS ten years of accreditation, the Commission commended the university for its work and “urge[d] the University to place considerable attention on continuing to develop the desired student learning outcomes and then assessing their accomplishment.” Although much work has been done to build the capacity for assessment at CSUS, progress has been uneven across campus, and efforts have not been sustained over time. Various mechanisms for promoting and overseeing assessment of student learning are in place but are not adequately supported with resources. There is no central entity or unit that is responsible for moving the assessment program forward. The University should create an effective structure and process for oversight of assessment activities, communication of assessment good practices, and sharing and use of assessment results. Assessment activities should be adequately supported. More strategic and effective steps should be taken to build the interest and expertise of the faculty to engage in assessment of student learning. Assessment of student learning should be comprehensive and conducted in all programs, including graduate programs, and special attention should be given to methods of assessing general education outcomes across disciplines at the undergraduate level. Program review, with assessment embedded in it, must be conducted regularly and systematically. The results of assessment should inform planning and budgeting decisions. Substantial progress in addressing these issues will need to be made by the time of the Educational Effectiveness Review in order for the University to demonstrate its core commitment to Educational Effectiveness. (Criteria for Review (CFRs) 2.3-2.7, 4.4, and 4.7)

Financial Resources and Strategic Planning. As noted in the team report, CSUS has faced financial challenges in the last several years, with the slowing of enrollment growth, system budget cuts and unfunded mandates, and a structural deficit. Under these conditions, comprehensive strategic planning that aligns resources with objectives and that provides for wide constituency involvement becomes critical. As noted in the team report, planning should be more carefully aligned with budget, and budgets should be developed for more than one year at a time. Infrastructure needs and ongoing and new initiatives that are agreed-upon priorities for the university should be supported with adequate resources. Further, budgeting, planning, and financial reporting should involve faculty and other campus constituencies in a meaningful way and should be as transparent as possible. Open and clear communication about resources is critical as the University makes its way through these financial challenges. As planning proceeds, enrollment management initiatives are critical to the achievement of CSUS's enrollment goals and the building of its financial base. The recent creation of a new Strategic Planning Council and Budget Task Force are positive steps toward more careful alignment of plans and budgets. The new Budget Advisory Committee will also facilitate greater participation, transparency, and communication about financial issues across campus. (CFRs 3.5, 3.8, and 4.1-4.3)

Student Success and Diversity. As noted in the team report, three important values related to campus life at CSUS are “accessibility, opportunity, and diversity.” In fact, CSUS has become a very diverse campus – students of color make up more than half of the student body, and about a quarter of the faculty are from traditionally underrepresented racial-ethnic groups. Student success is one of the current priorities of the University and serves as the impetus for the promising collaboration between student and academic affairs. Retention and graduation data, however, reveal that retention and graduation rates are low. For example, six-year graduation rates for first-time freshmen for the five most recent years ranged from 36 to 41 percent. Most non-white racial-ethnic groups, and all males had much lower graduation rates. Data on student retention, time to degree, and graduation, including disaggregated data for various student subgroups and disciplines, should be collected and carefully analyzed. This evidence should be used to develop clear targets for expected graduation rates and strategies to enhance student success. Attention should also be given to eliminating barriers that may be impairing students' progress toward their degrees. Continuing and sustained efforts to promote student success should be appropriately resourced and the effectiveness of these activities assessed. (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, and 2.12)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report and continue the accreditation of California State University, Sacramento.
2. Reschedule the Educational Effectiveness Review visit from fall 2008 to spring 2009 to give the institution more time to address the issues of educational

effectiveness raised in this letter and in the team report. In extending this date, the Commission expects that substantially greater progress will have been made in the assessment of student learning and in measuring student success by the time of the EER 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 in its Educational Effectiveness Review Report. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to Chancellor Charles Reed and the Chair of the California State University Board of Trustees within one week. The Commission expects that this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified herein.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: John D. Welty
Charles Reed
Board Chair
Mike Lee
Members of the team
Teri Cannon