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**PRESIDENT**  
Mary Ellen Petrisko

March 7, 2014

Dr. Robert Riordan  
President  
High Tech High Graduate School of Education  
2861 Womble Road  
San Diego, CA 92106-6025

Dear President Riordan:

At its meeting February 19–21, 2014, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) team that conducted the visit to High Tech High Graduate School of Education (GSE), September 18–20, 2013. The Commission also reviewed the Capacity and Preparatory report submitted by the institution prior to the visit and its response to the CPR team report, dated December 6, 2013. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues Paul Heckman, Board Chair, and Allison Ohle, Administrative Dean. Your observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

As required for initial accreditation, High Tech High Graduate School of Education took a comprehensive approach to the review process, focusing on the four Standards of Accreditation. The Capacity and Preparatory Review focused on:

**Standard I. Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives**

- Further Aligning our Mission, Values and Educational Objectives
- Developing Clear Roles for Faculty and Administration
- Strengthening Board Autonomy and Authority

**Standard II. Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions**

- Cultivating a Graduate Culture that Supports Teaching, Learning and Scholarship
- Implementing Systematic Processes for Assessing Learning Outcomes

**Standard III. Developing and Applying Resources and Structures to Ensure Sustainability**

- Strengthening Leadership & Organizational Structures to Support a Graduate Culture
- Promoting Greater Board Independence and Oversight

**Standard IV. Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement**

- Enhancing Educational Effectiveness through Full Implementation of the Institutional Review Plan

With respect to Standard 1, the team found that the institution has taken the appropriate steps to ensure that institutional core values are reflected in the personal goals of faculty and staff, principally through periodic evaluations. These values and goals are expressed in the three strategic priorities of the institution: (1) model and promote thoughtful and forward-thinking teaching and leadership; (2) assist teachers, administrators and policy makers in their efforts to transform teaching and learning locally, nationally, and globally within and beyond its clinical sites; and (3) secure the financial sustainability of the institution, and ensure its future. Accompanying this alignment of values and priorities, GSE also refined and clarified its organizational structure, including the development of faculty and staff handbooks and generating a Shared Services Agreement with its parent organization, HTH. Finally, the institution has taken the initial steps towards a more fully developed and functioning Board of Trustees.

As part of its Standard 2 review and work, GSE paid particular attention to critical efforts to enhance its graduate school culture. The decision to hire a Director of Faculty Research, who provides mentoring and support for faculty and students, will have a direct impact on the creative and scholarly efforts of the institution as whole and represents a strong first step in codifying a graduate education emphasis. The initiation of a system to catalogue faculty members' time on different tasks should contribute to a fuller understanding of where their effort is expended and how activities can be calibrated to buttress the culture of a graduate-only institution. Finally, GSE is in the appropriate initial stages of aligning mission/institutional learning outcomes with program learning outcomes.

Standard 3 documentation included an organization chart that presented the relationships among administrative staff members and sources of funding for their positions. The team noted that the relationships among personnel and sister organizations remain fluid, representative of an evolving organization. Accompanying this chart was the detailed analysis of administrative responsibilities at four peer institutions. The chart and analysis provide a stepping-off point for scaling GSE duties in a manner comparable to other higher education institutions as GSE continues its structural development. The restructuring of the Board of Trustee Committees and leadership has also repositioned the institution along these lines, thus assuring a movement to appropriate independence in operations. With respect to financial and physical resources, the institution has solidified its management and systems in keeping with a developed organization.

Standard 4 was devoted to the Institutional Review Plan, which is well developed, aligned with WSCUC good practices, and promises sustainability. Necessary program review structures are in place, and there is a coherency among the connections linking the strategic plan, learning outcomes, and statements of scholarship and innovation. In

particular, the assessment process is sophisticated for a relatively young institution, boding well for its future application

The Commission commended High Tech High Graduate School of Education for actively living its mission through innovative and flexible concepts that promote deep critical analysis and promote continuous improvement. One example of this active engagement is an assessment system that measures both student achievement and organizational effectiveness and that staff have readily embraced. The institution's attention to organizational structure (Board bylaws, shared services agreement, Director of Faculty Research) provides evidence of a commitment to a steady recalibration and accommodation as both the institution and its environment evolve. Finally, the Commission commends the institution for its mission commitment to social justice and access.

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

1. Adherence to Credit Hour Requirements and Academic Rigor The team determined that the current monitoring of time committed to in- and out-of-class work falls short of WSCUC requirements (*WASC Policy on Credit Hour*). In addition, "the assignments reviewed, while reflective, did not appear to require the level of synthesis and analysis one expects of graduate-level course work, or that which is reflective of the nature of action research and evidence-based-decision making for improved teaching and learning practice. (CFRs 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6)". The Commission expects that GSE will amend its credit hour practices to conform to policy and that it will refine its standards of student performance to reflect a more rigorous level of accomplishment.
2. Board Composition and Deployment The current size of the Board of Trustees does not permit the constitution of Committees with membership that meets WSCUC policy; similarly, the Operating Agreement does not currently provide that a majority of members be independently elected. (*WASC Policy on Independent Governing Boards*, CFRs 1.6, 3.9) In addition, the current Board lacks a breadth of membership with relevant experience in the operation and control of institutions of higher education. The Commission expects that, as the institution continues to mature, it will constitute its Board with a sufficient number of members, with appropriate backgrounds, to address these current deficiencies.
3. Faculty Governance The clear intent of language in the Faculty Handbook is for a shared governance model, but the institution lacks the specific processes to make this intent operational. (CFR 3.11) The Commission expects that GSE will develop and implement explicit procedures for the ongoing ownership of the curriculum by the faculty, in keeping with expressed intents.

4. Graduate Culture GSE is a graduate education enterprise, which has significantly different attributes vis-à-vis undergraduate teaching and learning. (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.4) The creation of the Director of Faculty Research position is an important step in codifying the practice of scholarship and creativity as essential activities, but it is only a step. The Commission expects that GSE will continue to emphasize graduate-level engagements among its faculty and students.
5. Strategic Planning The team found that “While the strategic plan resonated with the themes, ideas, and challenges the visiting team heard in the interviews across board members, administrators, faculty, and students, the leadership acknowledged that it was not a living document.” Evidence-based decision-making, based on a vibrant strategic orientation, is vital to institutional sustainability. The Commission expects that GSE will develop a process for the continual implementation and recalibration of its strategic plan, and that the process will be implemented by the time of the next review. (CFRs 4.6, 2.9)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Capacity and Preparatory Review report of High Tech High Graduate School of Education
2. Proceed with the scheduled Educational Effectiveness Review for Initial Accreditation in spring 2015. 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, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of High Tech High Graduate School of Education’s governing board 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 institution undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC 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,



Mary Ellen Petrisko  
President and Executive Director

MEP/gc

Cc: Harold Hewitt, Jr., WSCUC Chair  
Allison Ohle, ALO  
Paul Heckman, Board Chair  
Members of the CPR team  
Christopher Oberg, WSCUC Staff Liaison