

July 20, 2018

Professor Rajesh Chandra  
Vice Chancellor and President  
The University of the South Pacific  
Laucala Campus  
Suva  
Fiji

Dear President Chandra:

This letter serves as formal notification and official record of action taken concerning The University of the South Pacific (USP) by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) at its meeting June 27-29, 2018. This action was taken after consideration of the report of the review team that conducted the Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 to USP April 11-13, 2018. The Commission also reviewed the institutional report and exhibits submitted by USP prior to the Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 and the institution's May 28, 2018 response to the team report. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleague: Richard Coll, Deputy Vice Chancellor of Learning, Teaching and Student Services and Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). Your comments were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. The date of this action constitutes the effective date of the institution's new status with WSCUC.

### **Actions**

1. Receive the Seeking Accreditation Visit 1 team report
2. Grant Initial Accreditation for a period of six years
3. Schedule the reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review in fall 2023 and the Accreditation Visit in spring 2024
4. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review to begin May 1, 2021
5. Schedule an Interim Report to be submitted by November 1, 2022 to address
  - a. Several upcoming leadership changes (e.g., president, deputy vice chancellor, and vice president)
  - b. Improvements in internet connectivity
  - c. The possible expansion of new campuses
  - d. Development of post-graduate outcomes and demonstration of significant improvement in assessment practices across all programs

### **Commendations**

The Commission commends USP in particular for the following:

1. A mission that contributes to the public good through a vision of achieving excellence and innovation for sustainable development of the Pacific islands.

2. Strategic planning processes that are comprehensive, inclusive of key stakeholders and forward-looking. USP achieved 80% of the 2013-2018 strategic plan's objectives, with all objectives tied to budget allocations and results reported on an annual basis. The University Council will initiate a new strategic plan in 2019.
3. Awareness of the member countries' vulnerability to the impacts of climate change that have resulted in academic programs and research activities in climate change and sustainable development. USP has taken a leadership role in the dissemination of knowledge and expertise in these areas within the Pacific region and internationally.
4. A sustainable financial position with reliable diversified revenue sources, and alignment of financial planning and the strategic plan.
5. A commitment to continuous quality improvement with regard to curricular development. The university has numerous quality assurance processes to verify that curricula are designed, reviewed and revised with high levels of faculty engagement and oversight. USP's program review process provides an effective mechanism for curricular improvement.
6. A commitment to the use of standardized course outline templates and common assignments, along with the centralized process of exam moderation and engagement in assessment tasks, aimed toward a consistent student learning experience.
7. The Planning and Quality Office, which exemplifies an organizational commitment to quality assurance, and formalizes planning processes across constituencies, resulting in documents such as the Planning and Quality Assurance Framework and University Quality Policy.
8. The Disability Resource Centre that provides support and accommodations, and fosters a strong community, continuing to expand accessibility for students with disabilities throughout the region.

## **Recommendations**

The Commission requires the institution to respond to the following issues:

1. Reduce vacancies in key leadership and academic and non-academic staff positions, using flexibility in hiring practices. (CFR 3.1, 3.8)
2. Invest in information technology resources and connectivity to meet the needs of current students and facilitate the planned expansion of distance education delivery. (CFR 3.5)

3. Significantly improve the assessment of student learning outcomes, including the use of direct evidence to assess student achievement of undergraduate program learning outcomes and post-graduate outcomes. The results of the assessment of student learning outcomes along with pass rates and grades will measure student success. The university should demonstrate student achievement of the seven graduate outcomes across all undergraduate programs. (CFR 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6)
4. Demonstrate appropriate rigor in degree programs exemplified, for example, in the grading scale and complexity of assignments reflecting a progressively challenging curriculum. (CFR 2.1)
5. Develop institutional research throughout the regional campuses to include disaggregated data, standards of performance and internal and external benchmark comparisons. (CFR 4.2)
6. Ensure that distance education courses include faculty-initiated regular and substantive interaction with students synchronously or asynchronously via internet, one-way or two-way transmissions or audio conferencing. USP needs to differentiate students admitted to distance education programs or to face-to-face programs to ensure comparability of programs using metrics of student success such as student learning outcomes, retention, graduation rates and student satisfaction. (CFR 2.5)
7. Expand the development and training of academic staff, specifically in the areas of effective pedagogy, best practices in assessment and use of data in planning and decision-making. (CFR 3.3)

In taking this action to grant Initial Accreditation, the Commission confirms that USP has addressed the three Core Commitments and has successfully completed the institutional review process for Initial Accreditation conducted under the 2013 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review for reaffirmation, the institution is encouraged to continue its progress, particularly with respect to student learning and success.

Accreditation status is not granted retroactively. USP must use the following statement if it wishes to describe its accreditation status publicly:

*The University of the South Pacific is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001.*

The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WSCUC refers to the quality of the institution as a whole. Because institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program at the institution, statements such as “this program is accredited” or “this degree is

accredited” are incorrect and misleading. The phrase “fully accredited” is also to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible.

The Commission stipulates that this action encompasses the degrees offered by USP at the time of this action, as listed at the end of this letter as the Consolidated List of Currently Offered Degrees. Any proposed new degree programs, off-campus sites, distance education offerings, and/or changes in governance or ownership require review and approval through the Substantive Change process. Degree programs that have been reviewed and included under this action may be extended to other currently approved campuses of the institution without prior Substantive Change action. Offerings at new locations may need to go through Substantive Change approval, in accordance with the requirements stated in the Substantive Change manual.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of USP’s governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the USP website and widely distributed throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and the Commission’s action letter will also be posted on the WSCUC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WSCUC will post a link to that response on the WSCUC website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that USP undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while contributing to public accountability, and we thank you for your continued support of this process. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jamiene S. Studley  
President

JSS/mam

Cc: Reed Dasenbrock, Commission Chair  
Richard Coll, ALO  
Winston Thompson, Pro-Chancellor and University Council Chair  
Members of the Seeking Accreditation Visit team  
Maureen A Maloney, Vice President