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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 11, 2012

Mary E. Lyons
President
University of San Diego
5998 Alcalá Park
San Diego, CA 92110-2942

Dear President Lyons:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to the University of San Diego (USD) February 29-March 2, 2012. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report and exhibits submitted by USD prior to the visit, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2010. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and Andrew Allen, associate provost and accreditation liaison officer. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

USD's institutional proposal outlined three themes for this comprehensive review: (1) defining, evaluating, and ensuring educational effectiveness; (2) advancing diversity in structures, climate, and curriculum; and (3) creating and sustaining innovative learning spaces. USD addressed each theme thoroughly with the full involvement of all campus constituencies. Significant progress has been made in addressing each theme with positive results in the area of educational effectiveness and learning spaces. Expected improvement from diversity initiatives has not been realized and this area remains a challenge, as noted below.

The Commission's action letter of March 7, 2011 highlighted two major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: a culture of assessment and implementation of diversity initiatives, both areas related to USD's themes. USD made a sustained effort to address each of these issues and the team found that the "progress in many areas is tangible and valuable, and can serve as a model for other institutions."

USD is to be commended for the cohesiveness found on campus among students, faculty, staff, administration, and board in focusing on challenges and achieving widely shared support for solutions. As the team found, USD is committed "to best practices and making high quality changes that are data-driven and sustainable." The Commission also commends USD for the major strides made in educational effectiveness, including the development of student learning outcomes across all programs and courses with evidence of changes being made on the basis of findings from sound assessment practices. The University Assessment Committee has been especially valuable in coordinating cross-

campus assessment efforts. As the team found, “assessment of student learning has become a university-wide endeavor that is now evidence-driven.” The Student Affairs Office is also commended for its close coordination with the faculty and administration to use data-driven processes for improvement. The Commission concurs with the team that USD’s focus on using data-based planning to renovate traditional classrooms in order to establish innovative learning spaces is a “model for strategic and inclusive action.”

As noted below, the Commission found that the university had demonstrated compliance with the Standards of Accreditation, and it acted to reaffirm accreditation with follow up monitoring. The Commission endorses the commendations and recommendations of the EER team and wishes to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

Revising the undergraduate core curriculum. USD has been engaged in extensive discussions about revising the core curriculum and substantial progress has been made, including adopting 12 well-conceived undergraduate learning outcomes, after initially proposing 42, and establishing a timeline for completion of the revision. However, the team found that the plan lacks “an agreed-upon articulation of specific philosophy, outcomes, or associated curriculum.” The Commission was pleased to learn that the president, with the approval of the board, has now made revision of the core curriculum a major part of USD’s strategic directions for the future. The Commission expects that at its next interaction with WASC, USD will have completed its revision of the undergraduate core curriculum and will be in the process of implementation. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7)

Improving the effectiveness of program review. The Commission commends USD for creating a comprehensive program review process that includes findings from assessment of student learning, utilizes external reviewers, and connects to planning and budgeting. Program review was found to be “well understood by the campus” and faculty members evinced a “willingness to participate.” The alignment of professional accreditation with USD’s program review process through a “crosswalk” document will be useful in future reviews. At the time of the visit, only one undergraduate program had completed a full review under the new process. Results are promising and the Commission supports the team’s recommendation that USD continue this work, making refinements to address “the relationship between student outcomes assessment and academic program review” so that results can be used to inform “evidence-based decision making about curriculum resources and program governance.” The Commission expects program reviews to continue as scheduled and also asks that USD consider including findings on the use of library services and results of assessment of information literacy in program review or a related quality assurance process. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.7, 3.6, 4.4)

Coordinating and assessing diversity initiatives. As early as the Commission’s 1992 action letter, diversity has been a concern for USD. It was highlighted again in the Commission’s 2001 action letter and in the 2011 letter following the CPR visit. As noted above, USD chose diversity as one of its three themes for this review, hoping to realize improvements in promoting the achievement of students from diverse backgrounds and making changes in the curriculum to emphasize cultural competence. USD’s mission statement also supports creation of “a diverse and inclusive community.” The Commission notes that while numerous initiatives and strategies

have been undertaken to enhance diversity, most have not been evaluated and limited data to assess their effectiveness are available. Further, the team observed that “it was difficult to understand how the various groups and committees supporting diversity interact with each other and how duplication of efforts is prevented.” The Commission concurs with the team’s finding that USD needs to identify clear goals and bring more cohesion to the wide array of diversity initiatives. The Commission encourages USD to facilitate a robust discussion about how diversity should be addressed in the redesign of the undergraduate core curriculum. While USD has not been able to attract a very diverse faculty and staff, it has experienced some success in achieving greater student diversity. The Commission commends USD for approaching parity in the six-year graduation rates of Hispanic/Latino students with white students. At the same time, recruitment and success of African-American students lags and needs further study and attention. The Commission expects that USD will be able to demonstrate definitive gains in various aspects of diversity and to provide evidence of the effectiveness of its many diversity initiatives by the time of its next interaction with WASC. (CFRs 1.5, 2.2, 2.10, 3.1, 3.2)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of the University of San Diego.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the off-site review in spring 2021 and the visit tentatively scheduled for fall 2021.
3. Request an Interim Report in fall 2016 to report progress on the following issues cited in this letter and in the EER team report: (1) revision of the core curriculum, (2) refinement of the program review process and completion of additional program reviews, and (3) coordination and assessment of diversity initiatives. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that the University of San Diego 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, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of USD’s governing board in one week.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website in approximately one week. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional

accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/ro

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Andrew Allen, ALO
Ron Fowler, Board Chair
Members of the EER team
Richard Osborn