



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

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Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
985 Atlantic Ave, Suite 100
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Dear Mr. Wolff:

On behalf of all Cal State Fullerton faculty and staff, as well as myself, I would like to express our appreciation for the hard work of the WASC Visiting Team, chaired by Dr. Gene Awakuni, and the comments articulated in the Team's report.

We are pleased to see that the Visiting Team noted in its commendations our "strong commitment to students, "an outstanding sense of community," and our "progressive use of technology and library services." We are also proud of our "nimble responsiveness to arising opportunities exemplified by the early offering of our Ed.D. program, reviving of the nursing program, development of the distance learning program," and "our excellent cross-division, cross-college and cross-department collaboration" (p. 25).

Our improvement of the physical plant since the last WASC visit, including "the Mihaylo business building," and "the student recreation center," as well as "the commitment to finding the best home for a continuing campus presence in southern Orange County" (p. 25) exemplifies our ability to manage and secure funds in order to meet the needs of our growing student body and our community.

Personally, I am very proud of our "impressive commitment to diversifying the student community" demonstrated by "the proportion of African-American male students [being] higher than that in the surrounding community" (p. 25) as a result of a recently launched system-wide initiative for recruiting male students.

While the Visiting Team's report stimulated active discussions on our campus, there are several observations and recommendations that require additional clarifications on our part. We hope that our comments below and the Senior Commission's action letter will provide us a common framework to re-focus our efforts as we move forward with implementing our planned activities in preparation for the Educational Effectiveness Review visit.

The CPR visit took place during the on-going and unprecedented state budget crisis, uncertainty, furloughs, reductions of faculty and staff, and downsizing of class offerings. Despite these present challenges, we are focused on and optimistic about the future.

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Hence, we offer the following comments regarding the Visiting Team's findings:

In the recommendation's "**Leadership and Organizational Culture**" category, the Visiting Team's report suggests that the "university should examine both its formal institutional structures for decision-making and its actual decision-making practices in light of its mission and vision, to ensure that it can effectively and systematically address competing needs with full and appropriate participation" (p. 26). Upon our request, this was further clarified by the Visiting Team in the email response from Keith Bell on May 5, 2010, stating: "The visiting team was happy to see the extent of openness and collaboration at CSUF in the matter of planning and budgeting, particularly during the current economic downturn."

We are proud of the collaborative and collegial way that we address competing institutional needs. We believe we can be even more transparent in the way we prioritize and budget to address circumstances through more extensive communications.

At the same time, we do agree with the Visiting Team that the current unprecedented economic downturn poses new challenges and that additional innovative approaches are needed to assure long-term sustainability of our mission and quality of our programs. We continually examine our structures and seek organizational improvements: one recent initiative involves a group of leadership development participants studying broader campus involvement in university governance.

"Campus-Wide Planning" was one of the three themes identified as a challenge in our self study and described in our 2007 Institutional Proposal. Therefore, the recommendations of the Visiting Team in the category of "**Planning**," stating that the "campus should become more clear about what it wants its planning to accomplish and to prioritize actions and results, tying its goals to performance indicators and the budget-allocation process" (p. 26) are already in motion. In addition to already existing University Planning Committee and Planning, Resources, Budget, Committee (PRBC), last year, I created a new Office of University Planning and hired the Interim Director for this office, Dr. Michael Parker, who is a member of the President's Administrative Board (PAB) and the PRBC. We are committed to fulfilling the premise of our Institutional Proposal in the Campus-Wide Planning theme and will continue to implement our action plan.

In the context of the above, the Visiting Team's statement "that CSUF cannot just keep planning to plan," which "takes up a great deal of time without corresponding results (CFR 4.1)" (p. 11) prompted a lot of discussion. While we agree that planning takes up a great deal of time, we are proud of the outcomes of our extensive planning efforts among other accomplishments. We believe, however, that we can do a better job of communicating the links between processes, initiatives, and outcomes of our plans and of articulating the indications of success.

Access to quality remains one of our most important planning priorities and accomplishments. The recent report in "Hispanic Outlook" (5/3/2010) ranks Cal State Fullerton fifth in the nation and first in the state for granting degrees to Hispanics, as a result of our long term planning and commitment to access and diversity.

Another long term initiative worth mentioning is our on-going expansion of the technology infrastructure that earned us a well-deserved reputation of being among the most technologically advanced campuses in the CSU system. We were the first CSU campus to launch a fiber optical network and our technology infrastructure includes wireless networks, student and faculty portals, library commons and an IT help desk that is available 24/7.

Another important outcome of more recent planning efforts is our substantial increase in the number of full-time tenure-track/tenured faculty and consequently, the improved ratio of full-time to part-time faculty, as a result of our hiring initiative to conduct 100 faculty searches per year for five years initiated in fall 2005. This long-term, sustained result is tangible, and it has made a significant change in campus life, especially in this time of diminished resources. In our Advancement Division, the Cal State Fullerton Philanthropic Foundation Board invited a diverse group of 120 participants to gather on Thursday, February 12, 2009 to explore the role of philanthropy at Cal State Fullerton in an interactive, all-day workshop. As a result of this event, a strategic roadmap was created to guide Cal State Fullerton fundraising efforts, which is already beginning to produce results.

Regarding the Visiting Team's recommendation in the "**Research and Development**" category, stating that the "university should develop long-term strategies for effectively strengthening these areas in order to maintain infrastructure, support recruitment, and encourage retention of qualified faculty and staff" (p.27) it should be noted that we have already started developing and implementing such strategies. In 2005/06 AY a committee consisting of 18 faculty members and administrators re-examined university structures supporting research and external grant activities and made 16 recommendations addressing its findings. Most of these recommendations have been already implemented. Moreover, last year, we constructed a three-year "research expansion" plan. This plan, which includes additional funding for strengthening a research infrastructure, was recommended by the PRBC and approved by me in fall 2009. In conclusion, "Research and Development" has already been identified as a high priority matter for Cal State Fullerton and an important element of our emerging strategic plan.

"Student Learning and Its Assessment" was the second of the three themes identified in our Institutional Proposal. We have made significant progress in this category since the proposal submission, which was noted in the Visiting Team's commendation stating that "[t]here is a strong, emerging curricular and co-curricular assessment program, including a widely used student involvement outcomes program for student leaders" (p. 25) In the recommendation's category of "**Assessment and Student Learning Outcomes**," the Visiting Team's report further points out our progress by stating that "the university has made progress in developing learning objectives for degree programs and General Education; has identified indicators of academic and co-curricular quality; has designed learning outcomes for program performance review; has established rubrics for evaluating student writing across the curriculum; and has expanded support for training faculty in assessment"(p. 27). We concur with the report's recommendation that the "university should expand its focus on defining and communicating outcomes for student learning across all departments and courses, and it should move its processes forward, so that those outcomes can be accomplished and reviewed effectively" (p. 27). We are moving forward on our Institutional Proposal's action plan.

In the recommendations category of “**Advising**” (pp. 27 and 28), we are intently proposing changes to both integrate and stimulate how we handle advising from admission to graduation. Advising was identified as one of the elements of theme three in our Institutional Proposal and we concur with the Visiting team’s observation that “[w]ith regard to all of the issues in this theme, it will be important to go beyond taskforce investigations and changes to also implement recommendations” (p. 23).

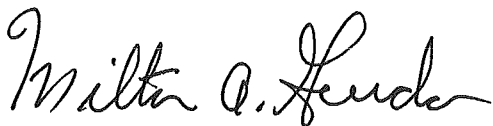
We believe that the recommendations in the category of “**Resource Management**” are related to long term planning and, as we pointed out above, we will continue implementing our action plan laid out in our Institutional Proposal. The Visiting Team’s statement “the university has been laudably protective of existing permanent staff” (p. 28) validates the values that lie at the core of our decision making.

The Visiting Team’s report on off-campus programs focused exclusively on the **Irvine campus**, following six suggested lines of inquiry. Virtually all of the issues raised by the Visiting Team, with the exception of programmatic assessment, were addressed in the Irvine Campus Task Force report. For example, the campus is in the final stages of seven-year lease negotiations to procure appropriate space for our South County presence.

With respect to assessment of the Irvine academic programs, the university has always taken the perspective that those programs are simply a subset of our regular academic offerings. However, the Visiting Team has raised an important point regarding disaggregating the Irvine Campus assessment data, where appropriate.

We are encouraged by the progress that we are making on the major issues of our three themes, including the active evidence of shared governance in these efforts. We are mindful that our current efforts must meet a very challenging and firm deadline of the EER visit. The impact of the state budget crisis and the related furloughs have reduced the time that faculty and staff have available to prepare for the EER, we would like to reaffirm our request for an extension from 18 months after the CPR visit to 24 months.

I look forward to our continued engagement with the Commission and to our conference call next month.



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