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Ralph A. Wolff

July 10, 2013

Leslie Wong
President
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94132

Dear President Wong:

At its meeting June 19-21, 2013, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to San Francisco State University (SFSU) March 6-8, 2013. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by SFSU prior to the visit, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2011. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues: Sue Rosser, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Linda Buckley, Associate Vice President, Academic Planning and Development. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

SFSU's institutional proposal outlined three themes for this review: social justice and civic engagement, the changing university, and student success. The team found that the University addressed the themes with seriousness involving a university-wide collaboration of campus constituencies. The progress made on each theme was impressive, resulting in several commendations from both the team and the Commission.

The Commission's action letter of July 5, 2011, following the CPR, highlighted two major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: ongoing state funding challenges and institutional research. SFSU has dealt with decreased state funding over these years with effective management and by placing priority on maintaining support for its academic programs." The university is now poised to restore areas reduced during this period and build for the future. Institutional research has seen a major increase in staffing from three to eight individuals since the CPR, including a new director, statistician, and web designer. A unified approach to data collection and analysis remains hampered, however, by the lack of a centralized data warehouse.

The Commission endorsed the commendations in the team report and wished to highlight three areas particularly:

Student Success. The Commission commends SFSU for the results of its Student Success and Graduation Initiative. Between 2005 and 2010, 6-year graduation rates improved from 43% to 50% for non-underrepresented minority students and from 31% to 43% for underrepresented minority students. From 2007 to 2011, first-year freshman retention rates improved from 74.9% to 80%. To its credit, SFSU is working to improve these rates, and has created living communities known as the Metro Academies to support further improvements. Given the importance of retention and completion to the mission of the CSU and as a priority of WASC, the Commission supports the goal of further increases in these rates.

Diversity. The team described SFSU as “the gold standard in its commitment to diversity as an intellectual, and talent resource.” Through mission statements, hiring practices, curriculum, student life, the new General Education program, or and research, the team found SFSU “not merely aspiring to be responsive to diversity but embracing it wholeheartedly as the intellectual and civic lifeblood of the university.” The Commission applauds SFSU for being a “best practice” university in carrying out its commitment to diversity.

Stability in Financially Troubled Times. SFSU has handled the significant loss of state funding with a focus on maintaining a strong academic program and on the University’s commitment to social justice and civic engagement. Throughout the crisis, class offerings were not reduced. Some of the shortfall was handled by not replacing faculty and staff who left or retired, by hiring part-time lecturers, or through increased staff workload. As the team discovered, SFSU is “still standing and its leadership system stronger than ever across levels.” The team found that the University community never wavered in its commitment to its mission. Now that the budget crisis has eased following passage of Proposition 30, SFSU can focus on recouping some of the personnel losses and restoring areas of need in the budget. The Commission commends SFSU for how well it has managed during this challenging time.

Social Justice and Civic Engagement. SFSU is renowned for its commitment to social justice and civic engagement. As the team discovered, “institutional commitment to this goal was evident everywhere . . . in the language and driving spirit of almost everyone the WASC team spoke with.” These two commitments are pervasive on campus, for example, through scholarship, course offerings, the new General Education program, social justice/equity forums, and service projects.

The Commission endorsed the team report and highlighted the following areas for additional attention and development:

Learning Outcomes Assessment. SFSU has made significant strides in assessment: all departments have defined program learning outcomes, and two-thirds of all academic programs have assessment plans that the institution rated as *developed* or *highly developed* using WASC rubrics. These more advanced departments have all used assessment findings to make improvements in their programs.

However, the integration of assessment at the course level is variable across the university. The team concluded that because of the varying level of development and inconsistent use of student learning outcomes, “it is difficult to determine the extent to which student learning outcomes are

embedded in faculty standards for assessing student work.” Student learning outcomes at the course level need to be tied more consistently to learning outcomes at the program level, e.g., through more consistent inclusion in course syllabi and through the program review process, which could include an evaluation of the alignment of course and program outcomes. At the next WASC interaction, the Commission expects that all programs currently at an *initial* or *emerging* level will have improved and that more uniformity will be evident in course syllabi, with learning outcomes a key component. The program review process should also be revised so that the assessment of learning outcomes at the course and program level will be a more effective part of the review. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.4, 4.6)

Strategic Plan. A new President arrived at SFSU just as the strategic plan in place was reaching the end of its timeframe. Rather than beginning a new planning process, the university decided to delay until the new President could become more familiar with SFSU and then lead a strategic planning process. During the 2012-13 year, basic elements of the plan were put in place by the President and the planning process is now fully underway. At the next interaction with WASC, the plan will have been in effect for several years; an update should be provided on the plan’s goals and the university’s success in reaching them. (CFRs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report
2. Reaffirm the accreditation of San Francisco State University.
3. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the offsite review in spring 2022 and the visit scheduled for spring 2023.
4. Request an Interim Report in spring 2018 addressing the following issues cited in this letter and the EER team report: 1) learning outcomes assessment and the related program review process, and 2) strategic planning. Progress should be demonstrated, as discussed above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that San Francisco State University has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the 2008 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 student learning and student success.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of SFSU’s governing board in one week. A copy of this letter will also be sent to Chancellor Timothy White. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on the SFSU’s web site and 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. The team report and the action letter also will be posted on the

WASC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WASC will post a link to that response.

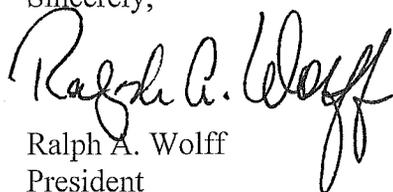
Please note that the Criteria for Review cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*. The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WASC website at www.wascsenior.org.

As SFSU works on the issues cited above, it should be mindful of the expectations that it will need to meet at the time of its next comprehensive review, which will take place under the revised Standards of Accreditation and institutional review process in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*. These expectations build on past practice and will include, for example, student success, quality improvement processes such as assessment and program review, planning, and financial sustainability. However, the *2013 Handbook* also includes new foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies at the time of graduation; and more visionary institutional planning for the “new ecology” of learning. The college will be well-served to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to approach its challenges in ways that will address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that SFSU undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while ensuring 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 written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" at the end.

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/gc

Cc: Harold Hewitt, Commission Chair
Linda Buckley, ALO
Robert Linscheid, CSU Board Chair
Timothy White, Chancellor, California State University System
Members of the EER team
Richard Osborn, WASC Staff Liaison