Western Association of Schools & Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges & Universities

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
MERCED
JUL 16 2007
CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

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Alley	Copy
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Young	✓

July 13, 2007

Sung-Mo (Steve) Kang,
Chancellor
University of California, Merced
P. O. Box 2039
Merced, CA 95344

Dear Chancellor Kang:

At its meeting on June 20-22, 2007, the Commission considered the report of the team that conducted the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) to the University of California, Merced (UC Merced) on April 4-6, 2007. The Commission had access to the University's EER report, submitted in August 2006, as well as to the supplementary materials submitted in January 2007. The Commission also received the report of the EER team and the institutional response to the team report, dated May 24, 2007. In addition, the Commission reviewed the letter of transmittal following the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) in spring 2006 and the letter of October 2006, outlining reasons for postponing the EER visit from fall 2006 to spring 2007. For the EER, supplementary materials were requested, which the University provided. The Commission would like to thank you, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Keith Alley, and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and ALO Nancy Tanaka for your participation in the Commission's review.

The UC Merced Educational Effectiveness Report and visit comprised the final steps in the University's progress from Eligibility status to Candidacy under the WASC Standards of Accreditation. To achieve Candidacy, institutions must demonstrate compliance with the Core Commitments to capacity and educational effectiveness by meeting, at least minimally, all or most of the Criteria for Review (CFR) under the four Standards of Accreditation.

The Capacity and Preparatory Review was concerned with issues related to the building of physical infrastructure, development of procedures, adjusting budget and planned growth to enrollment realities, and welcoming the University's first undergraduate class. The institution's Educational Effectiveness Review report, in contrast, focused tightly on a series of case studies related to student learning, student success, and teaching effectiveness. In addition, the EER report addressed recommendations from the team report and action letter following the CPR visit. The supplemental information helped

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to connect these individual cases to the larger institutional framework of planning, resource alignment, and infrastructure for effectiveness. The EER team found the EER report and supplement informative and helpful. During the campus visit, team members were able to interact extensively with administrators and professional support staff. They also met with faculty leaders and small groups of graduate and undergraduate students.

The Commission appreciates the level of commitment and energy that the creation of a new institution requires, and it would like to commend UC Merced on the progress it has made since its first graduate students were admitted in fall 2004 and its first undergraduates in 2005. The campus has dealt successfully with significant changes in administrative leadership from the Chancellor level on down. A center for teaching and learning has been created and a director has been appointed. Several retreats have taken place, providing opportunities for reflection and organizational learning. The campus has enrolled a diverse student body, a very substantial proportion of whom are first-generation college students. All of these are significant achievements.

In addition, the campus has become much better informed about the strengths and challenges posed by its student body. Student Affairs has been particularly active in reconceptualizing its function in terms of student learning, and is to be commended for reaching out to faculty. Some faculty, too, are beginning to make use of assessment findings. As the report states, team members found much to indicate "the beginnings of a culture of evidence regarding educational effectiveness."

The team report contains many observations and suggestions that can guide the campus over the coming years, allowing its efforts to become both more effective and more sustainable. The Commission urges the campus to study those suggestions closely as it grows, develops, and finds its special niche within the UC system. The Commission also endorses the report's concluding with three recommendations, and urges the University to focus on them. The Commission understands the three recommendations as follows:

1. Develop and institutionalize a plan that integrates UC Merced's vision and goals with its resources, and ensures that by the time of the Initial Accreditation review, UC Merced will be judged to substantially meet the WASC Standards and Criteria for Review.

2. Continue to embrace and enact UC Merced's mission as a student-centered research university serving the students of the state and the needs of the Central Valley.

3. Ensure a) that the Office of the President (UCOP) is fully aware of the challenging fiscal context and contstraining regulatory and compliance environment within which UC Merced must operate and b) that the UCOP provides the necessary resources and assistance for UC Merced to realize its full potential.

In addition, the Commission would like to highlight the following three issues, which will require sustained attention. They should be addressed in detail and supported by data at the time of the next review, i.e., for Initial Accreditation.

Recruitment, enrollment, and retention. At the end of AY 2005-2006, outgoing Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey called an "Enrollment Summit" to study the data, confer with the Office of the President, and ultimately negotiate more realistic enrollment targets. However, it is not apparent that even the more modest targets for enrollment, transfer, and retention goals have been met. For example, according to the August 2006 EER report, there was an expectation that the FY 2006-2007 total FTE would be 1,250-1,300 (as opposed to the originally projected 1,800), yet the campus website described the University as having an enrollment of 1,200 in January 2007.

The summit generated a long list of strategies for dealing with the problem of low enrollment. The University has also been alert to students' social and academic problems once on campus, and has provided or is planning to provide counseling, "success workshops," supplemental instruction, curriculum revisions, and other measures in an effort to raise grade point averages, enhance students' confidence in their academic abilities, and help them stay enrolled. Current efforts should continue, but they may not suffice to enroll and retain a sufficiently large student body, particularly once the high school population begins to level off after 2009. At present, the percentage of students on probation and/or subject to dismissal exceeds the UC average. To fulfill its promise, UC Merced must carefully manage its enrollment. The newly hired Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management (expected start date: July 2007) should lead the development of comprehensive plans for reaching enrollment, retention, and graduation targets. (CFRs 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.10. 2.14. 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5).

Funding and growth. The Commission understands that UC Merced's budget is tied to enrollment but that the campus also receives supplemental support from the state. According to the original enrollment plan, UC Merced was to enroll 1,000 students in its first year, 800 in successive years, and reach the break-even point in 2011. Under the renegotiated enrollment plan, annual growth of about 675 students is expected from FY 2008 through FY 2011; thereafter, annual growth of 500 students through FY 2015 is anticipated, and the break-even point is stretched out from 2011 to 2013, extending the timeline for supplemental support. At the same time that lower enrollment growth is anticipated, growth in ladder rank faculty will also be slowed.

Thus, UC Merced faces a complex budgetary and planning challenge, namely "the synchronization of construction efforts with enrollment, research, and faculty hiring," as the team report phrased it. The Commission understands that UC Merced found earlier enrollment projections "unrealistic" and that now, with experience, good data, and better planning, enrollment will be better managed and the budgetary repercussions can be more strategically controlled. Still, it will be essential for the campus to carefully monitor the data and be prepared to adjust to changing circumstances. Moreover, as noted in team

recommendation 3 above, the Chancellor and Provost need to continue to engage the UC Office of the President in providing assistance on this issue. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 4.2, and 4.5)

Moving ahead with assessment and educational effectiveness. Although there is evidence of a nascent culture of educational effectiveness, UC Merced will need to purposefully sustain that culture as it navigates any tension that may arise at this "student-centered research university" between the very real needs of its students and the demands of research. The team was not reassured to read in the supplementary materials that "faculty were reluctant to focus on developing learning outcomes because the time and effort required took them away from traditional academic pursuits and seemed like an administrative task." I understand that in the June 21 meeting with WASC, you expressed surprise at this observation and provided numerous examples to counter it. Whatever the reality now, the need for a strong focus on student learning cannot be lost as UC Merced develops into a mature campus.

In its two visits to campus, the team heard repeatedly about a small number of specific assessment efforts related to first-year writing instruction, the lower-division math curriculum, a required core course sequence in general education, service learning in Engineering, and a policy to distribute mid-term grades. These efforts are commendable and should continue, but assessment and attention to educational effectiveness also need to extend *across the curriculum* and become embedded in the practice of the full range of degree programs. As the team report notes, "there were indications ... that programs differed in the degree to which their outcomes and objectives were taken seriously by their faculty."

Along with graduate assistant training, support for using technology, and orientation workshops, the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, as it is now called, needs to make assessment of student learning a priority. Collaborating with faculty and staff, the Center can provide guidance in the articulation of learning outcomes, use of direct methods (as opposed to proxies, such as grades, or indirect methods, such as surveys), creation of rubrics, introduction of student-centered pedagogies, and related matters. It can help the campus to move beyond the listing of "measures" of student learning as they currently appear in UC Merced's Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators to an understanding of the full assessment cycle. The Center can also connect the campus with the wealth of resources available on assessment, and facilitate the assessment conversation between UC Merced and other institutions, including other UC campuses and, perhaps, other institutions both within the region and outside of it.

Beyond improvement of student learning, the center should ultimately play a central role in helping the campus to answer the question of learning *results*. That is, like other institutions, the campus will need to examine collectively its findings about just how well UC Merced students perform in a range of knowledge and skill areas, and address the question of whether this is good enough for a UC graduate, identify areas of need, and implement the changes that will bring about targeted improvements.

Program review needs to be structured to ensure that the campus's early focus on student learning continues. By the time of its review for Initial Accreditation, UC Merced should have at least one program, possibly Engineering (which will be seeking ABET accreditation shortly), that has gone through the entire process, with other reviews in progress or at least scheduled.

It will also be important at the time of the next WASC review to see how the criteria for faculty promotion, tenure, and merit, as explicated in APM-21, are being used, and to determine whether high-quality teaching and effective support for student learning are being rewarded. (CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.4, 3.3, 3.4, 4.4, 4.7, and 4.8)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and supplement.

2. Grant Candidacy to the University of California, Merced until June 30, 2011.

3. Schedule the Letter of Intent for Initial Accreditation to be due August 1, 2008. A copy of the Commission publication *How to Become Accredited* is enclosed with this letter, providing further information on the Letter of Intent (page 10) and the process for Initial Accreditation review. Note the expectations set forth by the Commission for Initial Accreditation on pages 12-14.

4. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2009, and the Educational Effectiveness review for spring 2011.

5. Request that the institution incorporate its response to the three issues raised in this action letter and the three recommendations of the Educational Effectiveness team report in its next Capacity and Preparatory Report. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report.

In taking this action to grant Candidacy, the Commission confirms that University of California, Merced has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness and has successfully completed the multistage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Institutions granted the status of Candidate for Accreditation must use the following statement whenever they describe that status publicly.

> "[Name of institution] has been recognized as a Candidate for Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and

Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001. This status is a preliminary affiliation with the Commission awarded for a maximum period of four years. Candidacy is an indication that the institution is progressing toward Accreditation. Candidacy is not Accreditation and does not ensure eventual Accreditation."

Institutions granted Candidacy are required to:

1. Submit an Annual Report form in the format required by the Commission.

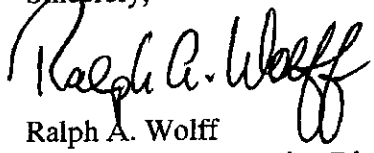
2. Keep the Commission informed of any significant changes or developments, especially those required to have prior approval according to the Commission Substantive Change Policy.

3. Pay Annual Membership Dues, calculated on the institution's FTE and prorated from the date of this action. An Annual Dues statement will be sent under separate cover.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to President Robert C. Dynes in one week and to the chair of the Board of Regents. It is the Commission's expectation 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.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

RW/aa

cc: John D. Welty
Robert C. Dynes
Nancy Tanaka
Members of the team
Barbara Wright

Enclosure