

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • MERCED • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO



SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR AND PROVOST

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
P.O. BOX 2039
MERCED, CA 95344
(209) 228-4439

January 8, 2007

Dr. Barbara D. Wright
Associate Director
Western Association of Schools and Colleges
Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities
985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100
Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Dr. Wright:

I am pleased to provide you with this letter and the enclosed material as a supplement to our Educational Effectiveness Report. As suggested in your October 11, 2006 letter to Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Nancy Tanaka, this delay and the request for a supplement have been useful for our own reflection as we prepare for the team's visit. In developing our response to your specific points, we reflected upon the progress we have made and the underlying web of goals and people that enabled us to make that progress. Moreover, it has allowed additional time to reflect on the role of "continuous organizational learning" that guides our educational programs and will continue to propel us forward in the coming years. This added period of introspection has allowed time for new senior management to become more fully engaged in the WASC accreditation process which has enriched our team's understanding and should lead to a more valuable visit.

In this letter, I will personally address two of the four important issues that you raised: leadership and the teaching and learning center, now named the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence. Your two other requests are addressed in separate enclosures. *Enclosure one* provides a detailed overview of the relationship between the WASC Standards and our Educational Effectiveness Report, along with discussion of the relevance of key Criteria for Review to UC Merced at this time in its development and in terms of educational effectiveness. *Enclosure two* describes the mechanisms for planning, communication, budgeting, and change that are involved in each sub-section of our educational effectiveness report.

Leadership: Building a new campus, especially a research intensive campus, is never an easy task. Turnover in the initial senior leadership has accompanied our transition from a startup operation to a small, research-intensive university. Founding Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey's mission was to build this campus from barren ground to opening with the first class of students and faculty in its classrooms and laboratories. From the moment of Merced's inception, that was effectively the end point of the campus's initial strategic plan, and it was well achieved when Carol stepped down in August of 2006. Her replacement, Interim Chancellor, Roderic B. Park, is an experienced and insightful leader who previously served as the Provost at UC Berkeley and as the Acting Chancellor of the University of Colorado. His term as interim is currently indeterminate but we expect that a permanent Chancellor will be in place by the beginning of the next academic year.

The mission that now falls to the leadership team is to build on the strong foundation by sustaining growth and developing as an outstanding research university; one that is distinctive within the University of California and brings the benefits of a UC campus to a region of California underserved by higher education. To fulfill this mission, we

January 8, 2007

Page 2

need to build an excellent faculty who care about the value added from an undergraduate education in a research university, to develop strong and sustainable academic and student support programs, and to grow the college-bound population of Central Valley in order to serve the region and California. This began when the first student walked across our bridge last year, but much remains to be done.

The goals cited above will frame the strategic plan that I am developing with the Academic Senate. We will work to establish areas of distinction that will mark UC Merced's educational and research programs while also providing a clear understanding of what is the value added for undergraduate students enrolled in a research university. The process I am pursuing is highly consultative, including faculty, students and other constituencies. My expectation is that it will require most of the coming year to develop the buy-in necessary to move the campus forward and to set a pattern of campus-wide planning as an integral part of the Schools' planning efforts.

To complement the strategic plan's development and to ensure that the process builds consensus and momentum around our broad campus goals, I am working with my Academic Senate colleagues to develop a detailed academic planning calendar that will link administration and Senate efforts and tie them to long-range goals and objectives. I aim to use this calendar to establish and nourish our internal shared governance processes as well as our external interactions. The calendar will detail when the administration will meet with key Senate bodies to vet and discuss enrollment planning, admissions, academic programs, student life and programs, operating budget, capital planning, and community involvement. An annual capstone event will be a "State of the University" talk with the faculty in which I will address enrollment success, student retention, graduation, student learning outcomes, student evaluations, progress on diversity, capital planning and building progress, faculty hiring/retention/promotion, and progress on our agreed-upon strategic goals.

The calendar will lay out the rhythm of our internal and external communication channels and help us optimize our path forward. It will formalize planning and, thus, help define the roles and responsibilities, joint and separate, of the Academic Senate and the administration.

I also want to describe how we are using the first year experience to improve learning outcomes as an illustration of how UC Merced's leadership is listening to student input, bringing it into the budget process, and then making improvements in support programs. Early on last year, the faculty were seeing lower than expected academic performance among undergraduates. For example, in a GE course for non-science majors that I teach, it was evident that those students who knew how to organize their studies, who came to class and asked questions, who regularly attended office hours and review sessions were doing well. The others were not. Many other faculty identified the same problems. Although at first we learned this individually and informally, many of us brought it back for discussion in the established groups that function within the schools, in Senate committees (e.g., Undergraduate Council), within Student Affairs, and in the Chancellor's Office. As a result, the Director of the Student Learning Center provided student evaluations from success workshops to the deans and the Director of Writing Programs. The evaluations provided us with a comprehensive understanding of what was needed to improve academic performance. The deans requested and were granted additional funding to cover increased advising, and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs added additional support for tutoring. With this consensus of understanding and financial support, tutoring programs were expanded in the second semester, and other improvements, such as the School of Natural Science's Excel! program for struggling students, were created with existing resources to enhance academic support and achievement.

With the benefit of hindsight, we now see that feedback processes such as these will be most effective within a robust framework of communication, support mechanisms, organizational (Senate and administration) structures, and leadership. This propels my efforts to formalize our strategic plan and to implement the communication channels and critical timing mechanisms that will be articulated in the academic planning calendar.

January 8, 2007

Page 2

Teaching and Learning Center: Our Educational Effectiveness Report briefly described the May 19, 2006 retreat and provided a list of questions that framed the discussion during that session. While these questions were discussed that day in some depth, the Retreat failed to provide answers that would allow the Provost, who was in place at the time, to proceed with establishing the center. Our Report did not explain our path forward, nor did it indicate the reasons for delaying establishment of a teaching/learning center.

Clearly, the transition from my predecessor, David Ashley, to me in July of 2006 was a factor in delaying the build out of a teaching and learning center even though the resources had been allocated. In my view, however, the most critical element in this delay was that we needed to determine how to maximize the center's value for both faculty and students, and to assure that precious dollars were wisely used on a unit that would be well utilized by the faculty. Questions raised by the retreat participants were invaluable in refocusing my consideration. Growing out of the retreat and subsequent discussions with faculty and key administrators, it was clear that a successful center must be a research-based support entity that analyzes the effectiveness of different teaching approaches and applies that knowledge *with* the faculty to UC Merced's teaching programs. Only by coming from this direction will the faculty welcome the center as an integral component of their pedagogy. An element of this redirection has been a name change to the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, and the position of Director has been reconceived as a position with stature in the Academic Senate.

The search for the Director is well underway: the job has been posted and advertised, a search committee has made the initial cut of applicants, and interviews are being scheduled. I am confident that we will make an appointment in the very near future and that the Director will be in place by the time of the Site Team's visit in April.

UC Merced is the first new American research university of the 21st century. The administration, faculty, staff and students who came to launch this campus came with a dream of developing something significant and lasting for California and its Central Valley. Although much of the external world has opined on the fact that we did not attain preordained enrollment numbers, the University community has steadfastly focused on creating a learning and living environment that is second to none. We have a unique and critically important opportunity to build a University of California campus that has the broadest representation of the State's many and varied populations. Helping to develop California's next generation of leaders, educators, scholars, and scientists from these ethnically diverse populations is of the utmost importance to California's future prosperity and leadership.

We look forward to working with the WASC team to pursue our immediate goal of accreditation and to create a student-centered learning environment that will meet the challenges of the 21st century

Sincerely,

Keith E. Alley
Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost

Enclosures

cc: Roderic B. Park, Interim Chancellor
Shawn Kantor, Chair, Academic Senate
Samuel Traina, Acting Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies
Jane F. Lawrence, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Nancy Tanaka, WASC ALO and Assistant Vice Chancellor
Karen Merritt, Director of Academic Planning Emerita
Nancy Ochsner, Director, Institutional Planning and Analysis
Robert Ochsner, Director of Writing Program