



May 12, 2006

Carol Tomlinson-Keasey
Chancellor
University of California, Merced
4225 North Hospital Road
Atwater, CA 95301

Dear Chancellor Tomlinson-Keasey:

With the UC Merced Capacity and Preparatory Review visit behind us, the team and I are now looking forward to your Educational Effectiveness Review. We appreciated the quality of the campus's report, which was well organized and informative, as well as the openness and seriousness that UC Merced brought to the review and site visit, and the cordiality with which we were hosted. The enthusiasm and pioneering spirit that radiated from students, staff, faculty and administrators all over campus were truly inspiring.

Enclosed is a copy of the final report of the Capacity and Preparatory Review team, including changes that were made to accommodate UC Merced's suggested corrections of errors of fact. The Educational Effectiveness Review, as you know, will take place October 25-27, 2006; four copies of the Educational Effectiveness Report will be due in the WASC office, and one copy will go to each member of the Educational Effectiveness team, twelve weeks before the date of the visit. The enclosed summary data form needs to be completed and included with the EER report. The Educational Effectiveness team will be comprised of the same team members who participated in your Capacity and Preparatory Review visit.

As you can see from their report, the Capacity and Preparatory Team found much to admire at UC Merced. They commend the campus for assuming a unique identity and special role in expanding access to higher education in the San Joaquin Valley, and they commend the Valley community for its Herculean efforts to bring UC to Merced. The team was impressed by the focus on first-generation college students and by the campus's status as a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities. It also noted the strong commitment to service learning, to assessment, and to proactive intervention when needed to support students' academic success.

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The campus has been responsive to the ten areas of concern noted during UC Merced's Eligibility Review (May 2003). It has inherited the University of California mission of teaching, research, and service, but has adapted it in notable ways to create a "student-centered" learning environment and to serve the diverse community of the San Joaquin Valley. There is a commitment to interdisciplinarity, along with unique, interdisciplinary research centers that will both serve the region and provide research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students alike.

The general education program is well-defined, creative, and designed to accommodate not only native students but also the large number of anticipated transfer students. The campus has benefited from a supportive relationship with the UC system and drawn upon those resources to create processes and procedures, but at the same time Merced has sought to adapt them creatively to its own circumstances. There is a high level of synergy among Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and other divisions that can only benefit the student body. Merced's identity and mission are broadly and enthusiastically embraced by the campus community. Overall, the campus is making very good progress toward full compliance with the WASC Standards.

At the same time, the UC Merced campus faces a number of long- and short-term challenges. In that context, the Capacity and Preparatory Review team report lays out a number of suggestions. These fall into two categories: issues the Merced campus is required to attend to before the team returns for the Educational Effectiveness Review in the fall; and those that the campus needs to address in the next 2-3 years, so that the institution is in the strongest possible position at the time of the review for Initial Accreditation.

For the short term, the team report recommends two specific steps:

- * The director of the Center for Teaching and Learning should be appointed as soon as possible and in any case before the October Educational Effectiveness Review. The center will provide essential support and leadership as the institution works to develop an evidence-based culture and to support faculty in their teaching and assessment of student learning.

- * Campus leadership should facilitate an intentional process of broad-based reflection on the experiences of the first year before the beginning of the new academic year in fall 2006. A retreat or similar event will make it possible to capture the lessons of the first year, solidify a culture of engagement, and promote intentional inquiry to sustain the educational mission. To the extent possible, students should be engaged in this process, in addition to faculty, staff and administration.

Over the longer term, the report suggests attention to a range of challenges.

- * Enrollment needs to be carefully managed, from inquiries, visits, and matriculation through academic interventions, retention, and monitoring of progress toward completion of the degree. Merced's fiscal health is closely tied to meeting or preferably exceeding enrollment

projections in fall 2006 and beyond, and the Educational Effectiveness team will undoubtedly revisit the issue of enrollments in October.

* While the support of the UC system has been helpful, it should not become a constraint. The campus should continue to look for ways to modify existing procedures or invent new ones to align with Merced's distinctive mission and student body. This unique opportunity for innovation and creativity should not be lost.

* As new programs come on line, additional faculty are hired, and student numbers rise, the campus's labor-intensive, high-touch approach to its student body will be tested. It will be essential for the campus to deal with issues related to scalability of its student assessment and support structures as well as other core aspects of the Merced experience such as student research, interdisciplinary general education courses, service learning, and the collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs.

* On a related note, as more faculty arrive and increasing numbers of research projects are initiated, the campus will need to find ways to sustain its focus on students and learning while meeting the complex needs of research faculty. The Center for Teaching and Learning, faculty orientation and mentoring practices, program review, and procedures for reappointment, promotion, and tenure, among others, will potentially play a role.

* Work on statements of educational objectives, methods of collecting evidence of student learning, analysis, and use for improvement should continue well beyond what is possible for the Educational Effectiveness review in the fall. Faculty will need to develop ways to ensure that their students consistently achieve learning objectives and identify indicators other than course grades. In this regard, Merced will embark on the same long journey toward a culture of assessment, evidence, and continuous organizational learning that other institutions have experienced.

* The campus's faculty, staff, and administration have been working at a feverish pace, wearing multiple hats. It is unlikely that they will be able to maintain their extraordinary levels of effort and performance indefinitely. Thus the issue of workloads and sustainability will require attention eventually in order to maintain the quality of educational experience the campus aims for.

* During the team's visit, you announced that you would leave your position at the end of the academic year. Thus the institution will face the additional challenge of locating a successor and at the same time maintaining momentum during the transition to a new Chancellor. When the new Chancellor is appointed, it might be useful to meet to discuss the accrediting process.

* Strategic enrollment planning and meeting enrollment targets for freshman, transfer, and graduate students will remain critical to the educational quality and fiscal stability of the campus. They should be the focus of continuing attention. As the team report noted, "the

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synchronization of construction efforts with enrollment, research, and faculty hiring is critical," and is likely to remain so for years to come.

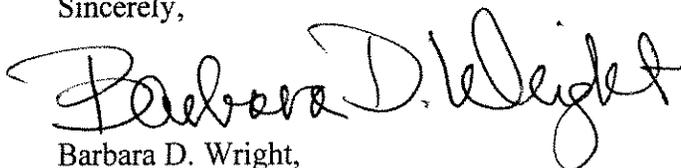
WASC requests that in its Educational Effectiveness Review Report UC Merced incorporate its response to the first set of recommendations raised in this transmittal letter. This may be done by referencing where these responses are in the Table of Contents or in an addendum to the Report. In addition the campus will be asked to provide evidence of how educational effectiveness is being planned for, what assessment processes are in use, and how data is being collected. The team hopes that in addition to traditional data collection, course evaluations, and surveys, UC Merced will "develop methods that more directly analyze student work" and create processes for interpretation of data in relation to institutional questions. WASC has two documents -- the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators (required) and the Framework for Evaluation Educational Effectiveness (optional) -- that can stimulate and guide those efforts.

As you know, the University's institutional presentation for the Educational Effectiveness Review will need to demonstrate that UC Merced meets, at least minimally, the 2001 Standards of Accreditation. The WASC publication *How to Become Accredited* lists 5 criteria for initial accreditation on pages 13-14. Of particular relevance for your upcoming review is the final criterion: showing that UC Merced has "collected evidence of student learning" and is "able to demonstrate how it has used such evidence to support inquiry and improvement in support of educational effectiveness."

Again, the team and I would like to thank you and the UC Merced community for your commitment to the review and for the spirit you all brought to the process. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions about this letter or about other aspects of the accreditation review.

Finally, the heartiest congratulations to you on your achievements in getting the campus opened and running and leaving it on such a solid footing. It was clear to me, when I was in Merced, that the campus community holds you in great affection and you'll be sorely missed. Best wishes for the next phase of your life.

Sincerely,



Barbara D. Wright,
Associate Director

cc: Nancy Tanaka
Pam Moody
Stephen Weber

Enclosures