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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 5, 2011

Sung-Mo Steve Kang
Chancellor
University of California, Merced
5200 North Lake Road
Merced, CA 95344

Dear Chancellor Kang:

At its meeting June 22-24, 2011, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted a visit to the University of California, Merced (UCM) March 8-10, 2011. The Commission had access to the Educational Effectiveness Report prepared by the University prior to the visit and documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2009, including the Commission letter following the CPR visit. The Commission would like to thank you, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Keith Alley, and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Nancy Tanaka for participating in the conversation with the Commission regarding the review. Your comments were most helpful.

The campus was granted candidacy in 2007 and applied for initial accreditation in 2008. Following a successful Capacity and Preparatory Review, this most recent review represents the University's final step toward initial accreditation. In addition to demonstrating the ways in which the University meets each Standard and Criterion for Review, the University's EER report highlighted three goals for its self-review: (1) developing a system of quality assurance that aligns curricular, co-curricular, and administrative units; (2) adding direct measures of educational outcomes to assessment processes; and (3) leveraging quality assurance tools to integrate curricular goals, assessment data, and budgeting. The EER team found the university's report comprehensive, candid, extensively documented, and full of interesting insights. In the words of the team, the report presented a picture of "remarkable progress."

The Commission's letter of March 2010 contained recommendations regarding assessment, program review, and student success, as well as financial, strategic, and academic planning. The team found "excellent progress" on the development and use of program learning outcomes and introduction of both direct and indirect assessment in student affairs as well as academic areas. Program review is "well underway," and the University has developed a suite of approaches to support the success of its diverse student body.

Most significantly, perhaps, the University has established a strong relationship with the University of California Office of the President (UCOP). A memorandum of understanding (MOU) has formalized the office's financial support for the campus over the next three years; in exchange, UC Merced will raise enrollment, improve retention, and in the short term shift the emphasis in academic program development from high-cost science and engineering programs to social sciences and humanities.

During its three days on campus, the team found much to commend. As in 2009, team members noted skillful leadership and appreciated the strong *esprit du corps* that extends

from administration and staff through faculty to students. The team reported that UCM has been “extraordinarily successful” in establishing outcomes and assessment processes, and cited creation of the Senate-Administrative Council on Assessment or SACA, which seeks to coordinate and integrate assessment efforts across campus, as a best practice. Clearly, the University is working diligently to balance its commitment to becoming a first-rate research institution with its commitment to serve students and the region; thus UCM is keeping strategic goals in view, even as tactical adjustments are made.

The team made a series of recommendations concerning the need to achieve financial viability, integrate assessment throughout the campus, use data to inform decisions, develop creative approaches to facilities planning and development, consider research on teaching as a form of scholarship in promotion and tenure deliberations, and incorporate non-ladder or contingent faculty in academic planning.

The Commission endorses these recommendations and believes the University can benefit from additional observations and suggestions contained in the team's EER report. At the same time, the Commission would like to highlight the following issues.

Financial, Strategic, and Academic Planning. Campus leadership has worked very effectively with the Office of the President to develop a multi-year financial plan that supports the continued development of the campus. This collaboration is formalized in a three-year memorandum of understanding with UCOP. As the team report notes, the MOU “can provide both stability and the opportunity to plan and make faculty hiring decisions with relative confidence – a rare circumstance for a public university in 2011.” However, UCM faces several years of operating deficits and loans from UCOP before “lift off,” or financial sustainability, is achieved at an enrollment of 7500 students. UCOP also expects the state to continue its annual \$5 million supplemental appropriation for the campus, despite overall reductions in state support for the UC system.

Financial planning is inevitably connected to strategic and academic planning. Thus UCM's administration will walk a tightrope for the foreseeable future, balancing enrollment targets, new construction, new academic programs, and hiring against fiscal constraints. Creativity, flexibility, and careful planning at all levels, as well as formal linkages among various planning efforts, will be needed to ensure orderly, sustainable growth in the years ahead. By the time of the next accreditation review, it will be essential for UCM to have achieved financial viability. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.5, 3.8, 4.1-4.3)

Assessment of Student Learning. As noted above, UC Merced has made remarkable progress in developing assessment processes and diffusing them throughout academic programs and student affairs, and the team found the topic “comprehensively addressed” in the UCM report. The level of faculty ownership of assessment is particularly impressive, and the library has contributed significantly to assessment of information literacy. Nevertheless, challenges remain. The team report noted the “tension between disciplinary training and integrated learning across disciplines” at several levels, including general education; and it found that “assessment of co-curricular programs in administrative units and analysis of the results is less consistent and sophisticated and to date less productive” than work in academic and student affairs.

UCM's task now will be to (1) extend assessment efforts to general education, graduate programs, and administrative units; (2) integrate assessment efforts in different programs and at different levels so that they can effect improvement efficiently and sustainably; (3) continue to implement external program review, incorporating the results of learning outcomes assessment; (4) optimize access to and use of data to inform campus-wide planning and improvement; and finally, (5) identify a cohort of peer institutions and begin to benchmark UCM students' levels of learning against peers. The faculty assessment

organizers and SACA should provide critical leadership in these efforts. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 4.6, 4.7)

Student Success. A majority of students at UCM are first-generation college-goers and individuals from comparatively low socio-economic background, with SAT scores that are the lowest among the UCs. While UCM lags behind other UCs in retention and graduation rates, the team found “demonstrable progress.” UCM students do succeed at levels beyond what the demographic data might predict. Clearly, the many strategies that have been introduced to support these students are working. As enrollment increases, however, the University will be challenged to maintain the same levels of mentoring, advising, personalized attention, and access to research opportunities that benefit current students. As the team report advises, “it is therefore important for UCM to achieve better alignment of retention strategies with resources” and to develop “predictive models to guide the admission process.” Student success studies should also include graduate students, who will be essential to the development of a strong research culture at UCM. For both graduate and undergraduate students, data should be disaggregated and benchmarked against the results of peer institutions. (CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 4.4, 4.6)

The Commission found that UC Merced had met the WASC's Core Commitments, Standards, and Criteria for Review. Thus the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and grant initial accreditation to the University of California, Merced.
2. Schedule UC Merced's next comprehensive review visit for spring 2018. As you know, the Commission is in the process of considering major revisions to the current three-stage institutional review process. It expects these revisions to be adopted by June 2012 and implemented during the following two years. Once the revised process is adopted, WASC staff will communicate with you and your ALO to explain the impact of any changes on your next comprehensive review and on the interactions you may have with WASC before that review.
3. Request an Interim Report to be due on March 1, 2014. This report should address (1) financial stability and sustainability, (2) further progress in institutionalizing and sustaining assessment of student learning and program review, and (3) updated data and information about retention and graduation and initiatives to promote student success.

In taking this action to grant initial accreditation, the Commission confirms that the University of California, Merced, has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the University is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

UCM is approved to offer only the degrees noted on the attached list of approved degrees. Any additional degrees that UCM may wish to offer must be approved through the WASC Substantive Change process.

Initial accreditation is granted for a maximum of seven years. Accreditation status is not granted retroactively. Institutions granted the status of accreditation must use the following statement if they wish to describe the status publicly:

University of California Merced is accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, #100, Alameda, CA 94501, 510.748.9001.

The phrase "fully accredited" is to be avoided, since no partial accreditation is possible. The accredited status of a program should not be misrepresented. The accreditation granted by WASC refers to the quality of the institution as a whole. Because institutional accreditation does not imply specific accreditation of any particular program in the institution, statements like "this program is accredited" or "this degree is accredited" are incorrect and misleading.

In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to President Mark Yudof and the chair of the UC Board of Regents in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be widely disseminated throughout the University to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in them.

The Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that UC Merced undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WASC is committed to an accreditation process that adds value to institutions while assuring 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.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you on a successful presidency and wish you the very best as you return to a faculty role in the School of Engineering at UC Santa Cruz.

Sincerely,



Ralph A. Wolff
President

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
Nancy Tanaka, ALO
Russell Gould, Board of Regents Chair
Mark Yudof, President, University of California
Members of the EER team
Barbara Wright

Attachment: List of approved degrees



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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

Consolidated list of currently conferred degrees at University of California, Merced
(June 2011, revised)

| | DEGREE | PROGRAM NAME |
|--|---------------|---|
| | BA | Anthropology |
| | BS | Applied Mathematical Sciences |
| | BS | Bioengineering |
| | BS | Biological Sciences |
| | BS | Chemical Sciences |
| | BS,BA | Cognitive Science |
| | Ph.D. | Cognitive & Information Sciences |
| | BS | Computer Science & Engineering |
| | BS | Earth Systems Science |
| | BA | Economics |
| | BS | Environmental Engineering |
| | MS,Ph.D | Environmental Systems |
| | BA | History |
| | MS, MA, Ph.D. | Individual Graduate Program with Emphases (see below for listing) |
| | BA | Literature & Cultures |
| | BS | Management |
| | BS | Materials Science & Engineering |
| | BS | Mechanical Engineering |
| | BS | Physics |
| | BA | Political Science |
| | BA | Psychology |
| | Ph.D. | Psychological Sciences |
| | MS, Ph.D. | Quantitative & Systems Biology |
| | BA | Sociology |
| | BA | World Cultures & History |

Emphases within the (Interim) Individual Graduate Program (all offering Ph.D., MS or MA):

- Applied Mathematics
- Biological Engineering & Small Scale Technologies
- Electrical Engineering & Computer Science
- Mechanical Engineering & Applied Mechanics
- Physics & Chemistry
- Social & Cognitive Sciences
- World Cultures