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July 6, 1998

Robert C. Dynes  
Chancellor  
University of California, San Diego  
9500 Gilman Drive, Mail Code 0321  
La Jolla, CA 92093-0321

Dear Chancellor Dynes:

At its meeting June 24-25, 1998, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited the campus on March 17-20, 1998. The Commission also had available to it the self study prepared by the University and access to the Web-based Data Portfolio. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with David Miller, Associate Vice Chancellor, Academic Planning & Programs, to discuss the team visit and report; his comments were quite helpful.

The Commission recognizes and commends the University for being one of the first to undertake an "experimental" self study and to develop a Data Portfolio. It has been the Commission's desire to create new accreditation models which would provide 1) a more simple and efficient means of assuring basic accountability, 2) permit self studies to be more aligned with institutional priorities and 3) to use processes that would contribute more meaningfully to the improvement of the institution. The Commission is very pleased to learn that this new approach proved to be useful to the University and was a better alternative to the traditional self study and visit format previously used.

The Commission also commends the University for selecting five important topics for its themes in the self-study format, and for developing a prototype Data Portfolio that can serve as a foundation for future efforts by other institutions. The purpose of the Data Portfolio was to experiment with a far more efficient means for the University to

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demonstrate it meets minimum WASC accrediting standards. The Commission is aware there were no guidelines for such portfolios, and thus the University needed to select and organize data on the specially designed Web site. The presentation of data selected by the University, organized by WASC Standards, proved very helpful in preparing the team for the visit and providing not only basic information about the University, but examples of the "culture of evidence" available at the University.

The Commission found the self study prepared by the University very effective. In an economical manner, the University was able to address five substantive issues, present useful data in some of the chapters, and again in some of the chapters, present useful recommendations for further consideration. The Commission joins with the team in viewing the quality of analysis and application of data throughout the self study to be uneven, and would hope that in future endeavors of this type that more emphasis would be placed on analysis and evaluation. Nonetheless, the Commission found the topics to be aligned with the interests of accreditation, and in many ways, interconnected with each other. The Commission hopes that because these topics were selected by the University, there will be a commitment to follow up on the recommendations for improvement, and that this entire accreditation process — self study, Data Portfolio and visit — will provide contributions to the University beyond the term of this process.

As reflected in the information provided by the University and in the team report, the development of the University in less than forty years to the level of quality and recognition it now enjoys is a remarkable achievement. As stated by the evaluation team: "UCSD has quickly emerged as a world leader in applied and basic research as well as instruction. Measures of program reputation, federal research support, faculty research productivity, faculty awards and honors, and student quality position UCSD among the elite layer of major research universities." The Commission joins with the evaluation team in congratulating the University for such an accomplishment, and for the demonstrable progress it has made in providing high quality instruction available to students alongside world-class research. The success of the college system, portrayed in the self study, remains as a distinctive feature of the University, and one that continues to provide the basis for innovation and variation within a large University.

The Data Portfolio, combined with the information and analysis contained in the self study, were sufficient to enable the Commission to be assured that the University fulfilled its obligations for demonstrating both compliance with accrediting standards and the broader accountability of its commitment to self-reflection and improvement. There are a number of very substantive and productive recommendations for the University to

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consider as it continues to address these issues. The Commission urges the University to do so. In addition, there were several areas the Commission wished to highlight as warranting further attention:

Continued Development of the Data Portfolio. One of the design principles for the Data Portfolio is that it might serve the University in an ongoing way as well as WASC in its periodic review processes. Thus, it will be important to see how the Data Portfolio can be continued within the University, and refined and improved. The evaluation team made a number of recommendations for continued development of the Portfolio, and the Commission encourages their adoption in a manner appropriate for the University. As stated by the team:

In the future, the portfolio could serve as a tool to bring together various ad hoc planning and assessment efforts into one place, creating the synergy to integrate findings. UCSD might also consider the public relations implications of such an on-line resource. Looking forward to the future utility of the site, the committee encourages UCSD to consider ways in which data contained in the portfolio could be easily downloaded and manipulated by users (i.e., imported into spreadsheets).

Planning and Budgeting. While not one of the five themes developed by the University, the evaluation repeatedly found the need for a more comprehensive and systematic planning process at the University. Continued growth, integration of program review recommendations, the addition of a sixth college, steps to follow up recommendations for the five thematic areas, etc., all call for planning at the unit level as well as integration into plans and priorities for the University as a whole. While the University has developed its own unique decentralized approach to planning, and the results have so far been impressive, there appears now to be a need for greater coordination and integration of data, priorities, plans and resources. The Commission is aware that there is a new planning initiative underway at the University, and this seems appropriate. The Commission will be interested in learning how the University, in its own way, will respond to these needs. In addition, the Commission is concerned that the University does not use detailed budgets for planning and resource allocation. While there are system-wide budgets and audit processes, at the campus level it does not appear that there is a specific budgeting document available for review. Such budget documents would be an important element of planning and decision making, and would seem to be central to vital University functions, such as departmental and program reviews. Without such information, it is extremely difficult for the Commission to discharge its function of

reviewing institutional finances, the alignment of resource allocations with stated institutional priorities, and campus based budgeting processes.

Refining Data Gathering and Assessment Activities. It is evident from the Data Portfolio and the self study that the University has a considerable array of data on many topics. As stated by the team, however, "It was less clear to the committee that the data collected were being used most effectively by senior administrators, divisional deans, department chairs, and college provosts to impact decisions of academic programming and resource allocation." The Commission urges the University, perhaps in its continuing discussions about the use of the Data Portfolio and beyond, to improve the dissemination and application of data. As well, the Commission urges that the types of data collected be reviewed to determine if the data will be useful to specific issues being considered by the University, and the methods employed reach beyond satisfaction surveys. In light of the issues arising from the University's concern with transfer students, campus social and community life and diversity, the focus of inquiry could be more specific and the methods used more multi-faceted. The Commission urges the University to develop clearer benchmark data in comparison with other national (or international) peers, so that data is reviewed "in comparison to" as well as in reference to the local UCSD context. As further described below, the Commission also urges that much greater focus be placed on developing useful information on student capacities, learning and outcomes, using more specific and varied methods than currently applied.

Expanded Evidence of Educational Effectiveness. The input and throughput characteristics of the University reveal a highly selective admissions process, students with very high academic records and promise, and evidence of high student satisfaction. As suggested by the visiting team, however, as impressive as this evidence is, it does not provide the University with much specific evidence on the capacities of graduates in vital areas, such as writing, problem solving, working in teams, competence in intercultural communication, etc. Indeed, useful steps taken by the University to consult with employers about the characteristics of UCSD graduates has led to the identification of areas needed for improvement. In turn, this would appear to provide an important agenda for expanding information about the effectiveness of the University's programs: what evidence is there that the level of quality of student learning and student outcomes, particularly in the areas identified by each of the college's general education programs, is being achieved? As suggested by the evaluation team, this is an area for fruitful analysis, comparative studies between the undergraduate colleges, and appropriate areas of common inquiry within departmental and program reviews. As stated by the team:

Existing evaluation processes at UCSD typically, almost exclusively, focus on information related to program inputs (e.g., faculty qualifications, curriculum design) and throughputs (e.g., student satisfaction with instruction). Available outcomes information tends to be self-reported, global, summative measures, such as the percentage of graduates engaged in postgraduate study. While the recent employer focus group with employers mentioned above is an excellent start, regular independent, assessment of graduates' communication, analytical, leadership, team-building or other skills is needed. Indeed, little information about graduates' accumulated knowledge or competencies in specific areas is used in program and service evaluation.

The Commission supports as well the recommendation that the Committee on Educational Policy (CEP) consider strengthening its procedures for program reviews to include explicit statements of the knowledge and skills expected of students who graduate, and inquiry into whether such objectives have been met.

On the basis of the foregoing, the Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the accreditation of the University of California, San Diego;
2. Schedule the next comprehensive visit to the University in the spring of 2008. The draft of the self study in preparation for this visit will be due October 15, 2007, and the final self study will be due two months before the visit.
3. Request ten (10) copies of a Fifth-Year report be submitted by March 1, 2003, providing an update on the five themes as well as the issues in this letter. Enclosed is a memorandum providing guidance on the format and content of a fifth-year report. It is hoped the Data Portfolio, as refined, will be continued and included in this report.

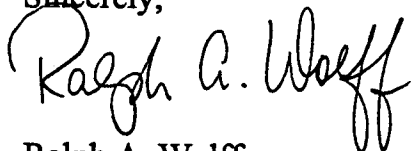
In addition, the Commission wishes to encourage the University to collaborate with WASC in the further development of new visit models and Data Portfolios. The Commission is very interested in continuing to develop approaches to accreditation which have external credibility and provide value to institutions. As the Commission is now

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undertaking a review of its current practices, processes and Standards, it welcomes the University's involvement in this process. The Commission believes that the collaborative tone established in this accreditation process could serve as a model for the future.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments regarding this action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and "W".

Ralph A. Wolff  
Executive Director

RW/bm

cc: David K. Winter  
David M. Miller  
Members of the Team