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

March 3, 2010

Marye Anne Fox
Chancellor
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive
La Jolla, CA 92093-0001

Dear Chancellor Fox:

At its meeting on February 17-19, 2010, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) on October 14-16, 2009. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by UCSD prior to the visit, the institution's December 14, 2009 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2008. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and ALO Barbara Sawrey. Your comments were helpful.

UCSD's institutional proposal outlined four themes for this comprehensive review: information literacy, foreign language instruction, undergraduate program review, and entry-level and freshmen writing. The university carefully addressed each theme and made recommendations for improvement in each area. The Commission shares the team's conclusion that UCSD's work in the Educational Effectiveness Review "used multiple forms of evidence to explore the themes and demonstrate its commitment to inquiry, use of appropriate methodology, and data-driven decision-making." The Commission noted that reports on information literacy and foreign language instruction were still being processed and further action would be needed to effectuate the recommendations that resulted from the university's self-study. UCSD placed major emphasis on reviewing the General Education component of the unique undergraduate program in the individual colleges and on undergraduate majors throughout the institution. This process led to improvements at the program level and in each of the six colleges. More limited progress was demonstrated toward the goals of the entry-level and freshmen writing theme and further work will be needed, building on the strong base established during the comprehensive review.

The Commission's action letter of June 25, 2008 highlighted four major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: assessment of student learning, information literacy, diversity, and strategic planning. Two of these issues, assessment and information literacy, were encompassed within the themes set forth in the institutional proposal and were the focus of great attention by UCSD. Increasing the diversity of the student population and the faculty and improving the climate for and the success of students from underrepresented groups have been persistent challenges for UCSD. Despite "significant effort," there has been a lack of "measurable progress." The Commission also noted that good work had been done on strategic planning and budgeting, which connect the 2004 Long Range Development Plan, the "Charting the Course" plan, and regular program reviews. The current state budget crisis in California has the potential for jeopardizing some of the strategic planning goals, such as expanding enrollment. However, the Commission is encouraged that UCSD will manage the financial challenges it faces effectively because of its record of effective planning and its establishment of clear priorities and a collaborative process to address the budget issues.

UCSD is commended not only for addressing its four selected themes and the four issues highlighted by the Commission after the CPR, but for engaging with seriousness the broader WASC Standards and processes. Between the CPR and EER, a robust accreditation web site was developed, consisting of a comprehensive data network that the team describes "as an exemplar to other institutions." UCSD made substantial progress on building the capacity for assessment of student learning, developing program learning outcomes for its 24 departments, 17 programs, and six colleges, and extending this work to graduate-level programs. Although the quality and effectiveness of the assessment effort are variable, the results to date represent a major commitment to establish and assess learning outcomes throughout the university. As noted by the team, UCSD also addressed the changes to the CFRs in the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation* and the increased emphasis on student success, program review, and the sustainability of educational effectiveness plans that was effectuated by these changes. As noted in its report, "the team appreciated the seriousness and intentionality of UCSD, the transparency, and the comprehensive nature of their work."

The Commission commends UCSD for maintaining a strongly cohesive campus during times of economic turmoil. Morale among students and faculty has been maintained at a high level, with the focus placed on keeping academic programs strong and continuing the learning communities developed in each of the six colleges. The team was "impressed by the highly positive input we received from faculty, students, staff, and administration about the character of UC San Diego, and the universal commitment to high quality education . . . especially noteworthy at a time of financial uncertainty." They further commented that "though a large and comprehensive university, UCSD has achieved much to provide a collegiate experience for its undergraduates... The high first- and second-year retention rates suggest success in this regard."

The Commission endorses the recommendations of the EER team and wishes to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

Assessment of Student Learning and Program Review. As noted above, the development of student learning outcomes throughout the campus was a major accomplishment undertaken in a short period of time. Attention now needs to be placed on going deeper. Over the next few years, these outcomes need further refinement and development as a cultural shift takes place from a teacher-centered to a student- and learning-centered emphasis.

The next steps toward a stronger program of assessment should focus on the continued development of the faculty's capacity to assess student learning and the building of faculty engagement and support for the educational effectiveness enterprise. The importance of faculty engagement cannot be overstated. It was evident from the visit that many faculty members do not yet believe in the importance of a well-defined assessment plan and in the value of using direct and indirect evidence of student learning for improvement in teaching and learning. As noted in the team report, some faculty members indicated that "they are continuing to consider how to develop direct measures of learning across courses," and moving away from relying exclusively on grades as a measure of learning. The team also noted that in some departments, assessment of learning is not well understood and is an "area of continuing evolution."

The team recommended that the institution "continue to encourage and assist academic programs in understanding and incorporating learning assessment as a part of the review process." For example, assessment would be strengthened through mapping of outcomes to courses and the use of faculty-developed tools for assessment. The Commission encourages UCSD to ensure that the next phases of assessment development are led and undertaken by the faculty so that educational effectiveness through assessment of student learning becomes part of the campus culture and practice. There are also emerging best practices being undertaken by other research universities, including within the UC, and UCSD is encouraged to draw upon these resources as well. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.5-4.7)

Related to assessment of student learning is continued attention to the effectiveness of the program review process. As noted by the team, support is needed for faculty members who are integrating findings from assessment of student learning into program reviews. UCSD is also advised to consider carefully the team's recommendations concerning the time frame for the completion of program reviews. (CFRs 2.7, 4.4)

Financial Planning and Management. Along with all public institutions in California, UCSD experienced a reduction of state subsidies which amounted to a multi-million dollar budget shortfall in the current year. Through one-time savings, UCSD has managed, with minimal impact, to achieve a balanced budget by means of savings from employee furloughs, funds borrowed from internal required reserves, and reductions of some unit budgets. The Commission joins the team in commending campus administration for its prioritization of "sustaining the quality of the education and research mission, while maintaining access for all qualified students" and for the "open, consultative process that has kept the morale on campus stable and positive." The team noted, however, that even counting on state-approved tuition and fee increases beginning in 2010-11, these steps may have only delayed the likely necessity of making deeper budget reductions in the coming years. The uncertainty of state funding levels and the ramifications of further budget reductions on UCSD's operations will require careful and strategic planning and financial management to ensure the continued quality of education and progress on the matters noted in this letter. (CFRs 1.8, 3.5, 4.1-4.2)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of University of California, San Diego.

2. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2019 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2021. The Institutional Proposal for this comprehensive review will be due in fall 2017.

3. Request an Interim Report by November 1, 2012 with an update on progress in the assessment of student learning and academic program review that are cited in this letter and in the EER team report.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that University of California, San Diego 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 institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

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 institution to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in them.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the university 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.

Sincerely,

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

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cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
Russell Gould, Chair of UC Board of Regents
President Mark Yudof
Barbara Sawrey, ALO
Members of the EER Team
Richard Osborn