



JUL 20 2010

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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolff

July 14, 2010

Rollin C. Richmond
President
Humboldt State University
One Harpst Street
Arcata, CA 95521-8999

Dear President Richmond:

At its meeting June 16-18, 2010, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Humboldt State University (HSU) February 3-5, 2010. The Commission also reviewed the University's accreditation history, the action letter that followed the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR), the EER report submitted by the University prior to the visit, and the institutional response you submitted prior to the Commission meeting. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you, Provost Robert Snyder, Professor and Chair of the EER Steering Committee Rob van Kirk, and Vice Provost and ALO Jená Burges. Your observations on the WASC process and your updates regarding the University's progress since the visit were very helpful.

The EER team found the University's EER report well written, well supported by evidence, and generally aligned with the Institutional Proposal. The report contained essays addressing four themes: 1) understanding student learning; 2) making excellence inclusive; 3) realigning resources and institutional structures; and 4) engaging in organizational learning and improvement. The latter two themes were not part of the original proposal but emerged out of initiatives HSU has undertaken in the last three years to deal with budget problems and a dysfunctional campus culture. As such, the team found these departures from the proposal entirely positive.

The EER team also found that the University had responded well to recommendations coming out of the CPR visit, namely 1) to assess student learning at the level of the institution, general education, and the major; 2) to use data to create a culture of evidence and improve decision making, particularly in the area of the strategic plan; 3) to advance the "Making Excellence Inclusive" initiative; and 4) to establish priorities, align resources, and engage in decision making to support those priorities. The team report describes at length the documents that reflected progress in each of these areas.

The team was thorough in its examination and analysis of evidence to support the four themes of the EER. Its report concludes by commending HSU for the progress the University has made in 1) understanding the need to assess student learning; 2) developing approaches to making excellence inclusive; 3) embracing initiatives that can create a new campus culture characterized by collegiality, civil discourse, and transparency; and 4) undertaking academic program prioritization and re-allocation of resources. The Commission joins the team in commending the University for this progress and further notes that the University has made excellent use of consultants and data as well as the talents of the University community.

The team observed that in each of the areas cited above, new structures have been created, processes introduced, and new understandings developed. While there are some signal examples of improvements stemming from these changes, change has not yet become pervasive across campus, and for the most part results are still to be realized. Thus the team recommended further progress in each of the four areas noted above, and then concluded with a fifth recommendation: that the University “be held accountable to complete the good work that has begun.”

The Commission endorses the team’s recommendations and discusses them briefly below, noting in each instance the need for further progress. In addition, the Commission would like to emphasize the critical significance of the team’s fifth recommendation, *sustaining* progress over the long term. Only by sustaining these efforts can the benefits – the results – emerge.

Assessing Student Learning. The team found that over the 24 months between CPR and EER visits, progress had been made in identifying and assessing outcomes at the level of the institution, general education, degree programs, and the co-curriculum. The team also examined in depth the program review process for three departments. The team concluded that HSU has “taken to heart the need for assessment of student learning at multiple levels” but also found that “the institution has a distance to go before assessment and evidence-driven decision making are fully embraced by its faculty and staff.”

According to the team report, seven institutional outcomes have been defined, but at the time of the visit, the University could not provide evidence that the outcomes were being achieved. One of these outcomes is writing, yet HSU acknowledged that only a “handful” of programs had assessed writing. Department and program outcomes and methods “vary widely in quality,” and there is a relative absence of direct methods such as capstones, portfolios, and senior theses. On the Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators only a little over half of programs report assessment of outcomes or improvements made as a result. General education assessment is described as “nascent.” In addition, “alignment of curriculum requirements and assessment of student learning at various levels is still a work in progress.” The report concludes that “there is little ... to suggest that student learning results are currently being systematically and universally assessed and that the assessments are being used to improve learning and teaching.” The Commission sees this as an area in which further progress is needed. (CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 4.6, 4.7)

Making Excellence Inclusive. The team found that much activity had taken place since the CPR visit, noting the *Dissecting Diversity for HSU* report and the development of several disaggregated data sets for access, retention, and graduation rates as well as demographic data on students, faculty and staff. The team also reviewed a list of support activities. While these products were viewed as very positive, the team concluded that there was “less evidence that these initiatives have produced meaningful and sustainable results across the institution.” Nor does it appear that assessment of learning has been used to support the success of students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, yet this could provide powerful synergy for both assessment and the inclusive excellence initiative. Here, too, the Commission sees an opportunity for further progress. (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, 2.13)

Embracing Institutional Change and Making Critical Choices. This issue goes to the heart of HSU’s historical difficulties and the need to create a new campus culture that is based on shared understandings, clear governance structures, ongoing communication, and mutual respect. The University has made good use of the recommendations from two outside consultants. One result has been the creation of a Cabinet for Institutional Change, which has provided leadership for a redefinition of the University’s mission and vision, new governance structures, student success efforts, establishment of a culture of evidence, and standards of transparency, collegiality, and civil discourse. All of this is promising, but it will be

meaningful only if the positive new campus culture can produce results and current momentum can be sustained. (CFRs 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

Realigning resources and institutional structures. HSU's most pressing challenge has been to align its resources with educational objectives and institutional purposes. To meet this challenge, HSU has built new infrastructure and engaged in program prioritization. The prioritization process has been comprehensive, systematic, transparent, and credible; it has been driven by faculty and staff rather than administration; and it has led to identification of institutional strengths and weaknesses that can guide resource allocation and support HSU's vision. The team noted, however, that the process was limited by inconsistent data, varying quality of program reports, and little or no external benchmarking and comparative analysis.

A further serious weakness of the prioritization process was the omission of student learning outcomes. As the team notes, assessment findings and indicators of student success "do not seem to be built into the newly implemented plans, strategies, and activities." The team report suggests that it will be important for the Cabinet for Institutional Change, the Integrated Curriculum Committee, the Enrollment Advisory Committee, and other important decision-making bodies to act on analyses of learning in their work. The Commission agrees. (CFRs 3.5, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4)

Sustaining Current Efforts. By all accounts, HSU has undergone a remarkable transformation in a relatively short period of time, and this transformation speaks well for the entire campus community. The ultimate test of all these efforts, however, will be their sustainability over time. Related to and dependent upon sustainability is the question of *results*: what will actually be accomplished through this transformation in the next three to five years? In the words of the team, "efficacy ... will be demonstrated only when sound decisions are made based on the evidence gathered."

Because the issue of sustainability is so critical – not only for learning and student success but for the University's financial viability and adaptability to new educational needs – the Commission requests an Interim Report to be submitted in three years. The report should address each of the first four areas outlined above and in so doing demonstrate that efforts to renew and strengthen the University have indeed been sustained and have led to concrete results. (CFRs 4.4., 4.5, 4.6, 4.7)

The Commission acted to:

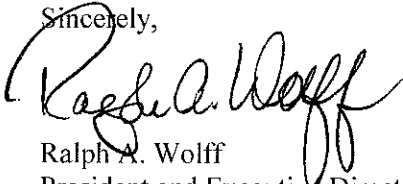
1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of Humboldt State University.
2. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for spring 2018 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for fall 2019, with the Institutional Proposal due in spring 2016.
3. Request an Interim Report, due November 1, 2013, to focus on sustained progress in assessment of student learning, student success/inclusive excellence, campus culture, and re-alignment of resources.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Humboldt State University 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, HSU is expected to continue to demonstrate the success of its efforts, as noted above.

In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to the chair of the CSU Board of Trustees and Chancellor Charles Reed 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "W" and "F".

Ralph A. Wolff
President and Executive Director

cc: Sherwood Lingenfelter, Commission Chair
Jena Burges, ALO
Charles Reed, CSU Chancellor
Herbert L. Carter, Board of Trustees Chair
Members of the EER team
Barbara Wright