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PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Ralph A. Wolff

March 3, 2010

Stephen A. Privett, S.J.
President
University of San Francisco
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080

Dear President Privett:

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 San Francisco (USF) on October 7-9, 2009. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report prepared by USF prior to the visit, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in fall 2007. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you, Provost James Wisner, and ALO Gerardo Marin. The comments of you and your colleagues were helpful.

USF's institutional proposal outlined three themes for this comprehensive review: effectiveness in supporting academic excellence as an essential component of a learning community; effectiveness in building a diverse learning community; and effectiveness in creating a socially responsible global learning community. These themes fit cohesively within USF's focus on service, and were well connected to its mission to be a "premier Jesuit Catholic, urban University with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world." The team found that "the report strongly aligned with the proposal" but "somewhat understates the quality of the planning, development, and implementation of assessment activities and the degree to which they have become an integral part of the culture of the University."

In addition, the Commission's action letter of February 28, 2008 highlighted three major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: part-time faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups; student advisement, persistence and retention; and educational effectiveness. Although, as noted below, work remains to be done on several of these issues, USF has addressed all of them with transparency, openness, and aggressiveness.

USF is to be commended for so effectively continuing its mission of service and focusing on the physical, spiritual, social, and educational needs of those who are disadvantaged, not only in the Bay Area, but internationally as well. (CFR 1.1) As noted by the team, "We found extensive evidence of awareness of the university's distinctive mission in numerous discussions with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the Board of Trustees... [who] made it clear that issues of social responsibility and global perspectives have come to be an integral part of community life at USF...reflected in both the curriculum and co-curriculum. (CFR 4.6)" This commitment has helped create one of the most ethnically diverse student bodies in the country, even when compared to other Jesuit colleges and universities with a similar mission. (CFR 1.5)

In spite of the broader economic challenges, USF has effectively managed its finances through cost cutting, revenue enhancement, restructuring long term debt, and budget reductions. The team reported that USF should “have no difficulty sustaining its educational effectiveness” and “may very well be able to advance its financial well-being in the near future...” (CFR 3.5)

Commendation is also given for the seriousness with which USF has addressed educational effectiveness over the last two years. In almost every program and underlying course offering, learning outcomes have been developed or revised, appropriate assessment tools have been created, and results are being taken seriously to inform improvements. The team observed that “the campus community is committed to student learning improvement through the use of assessment and to institutional learning through the assessment process.” (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.6, 2.10, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6)

In receiving the team report, the Commission endorses the recommendations of the EER team and wishes to emphasize the following areas for further attention and development:

Revision, completion, and documentation of the three-year comprehensive assessment plan. As noted above, USF has developed a very promising plan for the assessment of courses and programs, but program assessment is in the early stages of implementation. The EER team made a number of suggestions and recommendations for the University to consider as it proceeds through the next two years of the three-year Comprehensive Plan. Among these recommendations, the assessment plan should be extended to all campus undergraduate and graduate programs, and more *direct* evidence at the institution-, program-, and course-levels should be incorporated. As the team noted, “evidence of educational effectiveness is frequently presented as student self-report rather than direct evidence of learning,” and more direct evidence would strengthen the program of learning outcomes assessment. Program-level mapping is needed to ensure consistent quality between programs and to assist in the development of further assessment plans. The institution is also encouraged to incorporate evidence-based assessment practices in co-curricular programs and student advising. At the end of the three-year plan, USF should be able to show how it has used direct evidence of student learning to improve student learning, and demonstrate that evidence-based assessment has become an integral part of the campus culture. The University should assess the effectiveness of this plan and develop a follow up plan building on the lessons learned and areas still in need of improvement. (CFRs 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7)

Increase in full-time faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups. The Commission action letter of February 28, 2008 following the Capacity and Preparatory Review highlighted the importance of increasing the number of full-time faculty and, while doing so, hiring more full-time faculty from underrepresented groups to support the educational effectiveness of the institution and fulfill the University’s strong commitment to diversity. USF has hired many additional full-time faculty over the last few years, but plans to hire even more faculty were put on hold this year due to the poor economy. While appreciating this fiscally prudent step, the Commission wished to endorse USF’s concern over full-time faculty ratios and encourage the institution to implement the original faculty hiring plans as soon as possible. Given the continuing reliance on adjunct and part-time faculty, the Commission urges that they be included, to the extent feasible, in such processes as assessment, program review, and faculty development. (CFRs 2.1, 3.1 and Guideline to 3.2) Additional full-time faculty could also serve as one of several strategies to help USF fulfill its own commitment to improving persistence, retention, and graduation rates. Even though USF’s rates are already above those for similar benchmarked universities, the Commission supports USF’s goal to do even better. Additional faculty from underrepresented groups will help USF accomplish this goal by further improving student advising and providing more time for building strong relationships between students and faculty, which are key ingredients for better rates.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

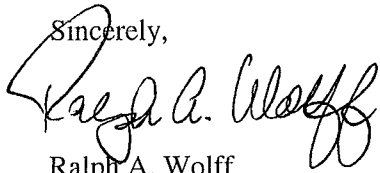
1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of the University of San Francisco.
2. Schedule the Capacity and Preparatory Review for fall 2018 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2020. The Institutional Proposal for this comprehensive review will be due in fall 2016.
3. Request an Interim Report on November 1, 2014 on the two issues cited in this letter: 1) revision, completion, and documentation of USF's three-year comprehensive plan for the assessment of learning outcomes; and 2) increase in full-time faculty and faculty from underrepresented groups.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that the University of San Francisco has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the WASC 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, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of USF's governing board 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

RW/ro

Cc: Sherwood Ligenfelter, Commission Chair
Gerardo Marin, ALO
Claudio M. Chiuchiarelli, Board Chair
Members of the EER Team
Richard Osborn