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Mary Ellen Petrisko

July 15, 2015

Dr. Richard Kriegbaum  
President  
Fresno Pacific University  
1717 S. Chestnut Ave.  
Fresno, CA 93702-4709

Dear President Kriegbaum:

At its meeting June 17-19, 2015, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to Fresno Pacific University (FPU) February 25-27, 2015. The Commission also had access to the EER report prepared by FPU prior to the visit, the institution's May 11, 2015, response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2013. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and Steve Varvis, Provost. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

FPU chose to use the process outlined in the WSCUC *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*, which included two visits: a CPR concluded in spring 2013, and an EER that is the focus of this letter. FPU's institutional proposal required under this process outlined six themes for this Comprehensive Review: 1) student achievement and strategic assessment; 2) aspects of diversity; 3) resources and financial stability; 4) core competency: writing; 5) core competency: critical thinking; and 6) rigor and meaning of degrees.

The Commission's action letter of July 10, 2013, highlighted three major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: 1) strategic planning; 2) culture of assessment; and 3) retention and graduation rates. Shortly before the CPR visit took place, FPU had installed a new president who was the first Hispanic president in the university's history—a university designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution with a 40% Hispanic student population. The Commission extended by six months the normal time between the CPR and EER in order to give the new president and the university 24 months to follow through on the three major issues. The self-study process for the CPR, which included several best practice approaches, had resulted in an outstanding institutional report culminating in a very positive CPR visit. The Commission had confidence that there would be a strong follow through on the team's recommendations.

After several years of rebuilding financial stability, FPU recently experienced two years of major financial losses without strong proactive action by administration to make needed changes to correct the situation. For example, efforts to find a full-time CFO proceeded at a slow pace. This situation ultimately resulted in the board's accepting the resignation of the new president at the beginning of the school year on September 11, 2014, only three months before the institutional report for the EER was due and five months before the scheduled visit. The Commission was concerned to read in the team report about the "unsettling impact of the resignation of the president" and the team's having found a campus climate in need of attention in order to bring "not only recovery, but restoration and reconciliation to the FPU community." The Commission is encouraged to learn that within five days of the president's resignation, a former highly respected FPU president agreed to resume his former duties under a dual leadership model in which the provost, now also given the title of senior vice president, is responsible for internal affairs and the president for external relations. The new team became aggressive in finding solutions to the major financial losses being experienced by the university.

In spite of this recent leadership transition, the team found that "the level of quality and detail in the report was exemplary." Many of the initiatives developed as part of the CPR and in the two years since have had very high levels of activity in spite of campus challenges. Several of the recommendations being made by the team and Commission focus on helping FPU further recover from the events of the last year.

The Commission commends FPU for:

**Restoration of Institutional Stability.** The Commission is encouraged with the finding in the team report that "institutional leadership acted decisively and quickly to establish and stabilize lines of responsibility and reporting at the highest levels following the change in presidents." These actions have created "a new level of fiscal and institutional stability." The Commission appreciates the openness of administration in dealing with current challenges and its self-awareness about further challenges. After a period of uncertainty about the university's direction, the new cohesive leadership team is working to build a clear path for the future. A clear indicator of success is the expected \$1.5 million budget surplus after two years in which the university had a total of nearly \$6 million in losses.

**Culture of Evidence.** The CPR team found a growing culture of evidence, based on strong educational effectiveness measures. This culture had developed even further by the time of the EER visit and has now become part of the university's DNA. The Commission commends FPU for its efforts to build this culture and the institution's resultant direct and indirect assessment of student learning outcomes; clear and transparent data; well-developed program review process; linkages between the university's institutional and program learning outcomes and its academic and co-

curricular programs and student services; and its focus on assessment as a continuous process. Regarding assessment, the team reported that “[t]he institution is making good use of and contributing to best practices in this area.”

**Implementation of WSCUC’s New Emphases on Core Competencies and Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of the Degree.** Following the CPR visit, the Commission commended FPU for voluntarily choosing as two of its self-study themes two new emphases of WSCUC’s 2013 *Handbook of Accreditation*, viz., the assessment of core competencies (in this case, writing and critical thinking) and the meaning, quality and integrity of FPU degrees. Because the university chose to continue with the 2008 reaffirmation process, they were not obligated to address these requirements of the 2013 *Handbook*, and the Commission commends the university both for doing so and for the Inquiry Circle approach used to explore these new areas. These groups of faculty, staff, administrators, and students demonstrate how a university can bring together a community for long term sustainable exploration and improvement. As the team found, “The evidence and collegiality exhibited by this learning community is evidence of the effectiveness of the inquiry circles as a tool that will help the institution continue to have rich dialogues about the culture of writing at FPU.” Similarly for critical thinking, the team found evidence of FPU’s “establishing a cycle of data collection and analysis, and closing the loop/corrective measures...to attain continuous improvement and to document inter-institutional benchmarks for critical thinking in general education and major programs.”

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

**Communication and Decision-Making.** The Commission understands that boards sometimes have to make difficult decisions based on information that must be kept confidential. However, it also shares the concern expressed in the team’s finding, “The most significant gap, and perhaps the greatest question left unanswered by the [institutional] report, was the extent to which these events [i.e., changes in leadership] had affected the climate of the institution. The tone of the report was quite positive, and there have been many positive steps from a leadership perspective; however, there was little evidence in the report of voices other than those of leadership.” The Commission encourages the university to give special attention to the team’s concern that “providing information is welcome but not as valuable as discussions.” As part of restoring a more positive climate and greater trust in decision-making, the board and administration will need to build trust across constituencies “so that all voices feel safe and welcome.” The Special Visit referenced later in this letter will focus on how the board and administration have improved communication and decision-making processes and the impact that changes in these areas will have made in improving a climate of trust and openness. (CFRs 3.6, 3.7)

**Diversity.** One of the six themes focused on by FPU in this review was diversity. At the time of the CPR visit, the former president, who is Hispanic, was serving as the leader of these efforts. Some accomplishments were realized during his tenure, but it became apparent to the EER visiting team that there is now a need for a shared vision for diversity with “more campus-wide, systematic training on multiculturalism, diversity issues, and intercultural competence.” Many at the institution are ready and enthusiastic to embrace this emphasis. Diversity efforts are now co-led by a faculty and a staff member. The Commission supports the team’s recommendation that the university begin aggressive work on developing a unified vision for diversity, including a clearer definition of the role of the University Diversity Committee. This work has become even more important given the climate issues that developed upon the departure of the former president. The Commission further supports the implementation of the university’s recommendations from the CPR and EER institutional reports and the team’s recommendations in both team reports related to diversity. The Special Visit will focus on the progress of these efforts. (CFR 1.4)

**Strategic Planning.** Implementation of the strategic plan, ensuring its alignment with the budget, was a recommendation from the CPR team. Work continued on the plan following the CPR visit, but board approval and campus implementation were delayed with the sudden departure of the former president. The board planned to adopt the plan the day after the EER visit finished. The Commission supports the team recommendation that work continue on institution-wide implementation and ownership of the strategic plan. The Special Visit will focus, in part, on the new strategic plan with evidence of implementation and progress toward meeting the plan’s goals tied to budget. (CFR 4.6)

**Financial Stability.** The Commission appreciates the restoration of financial stability during the current year, following on two years of significant financial losses and very difficult decisions by the board and administration. It is anticipated that the hiring of a full-time qualified CFO who has broad support across the university will contribute to further financial stability. At a time when many small faith-based universities are experiencing financial challenges, FPU will need to ensure that it operates on a sound financial footing bolstered by well-developed enrollment management and advancement plans. The Commission is encouraged to hear that the new president, who has strong ties to the sponsoring church and broader community, plans to focus his greatest attention on raising funds for the university. The materials prepared for the Special Visit will need to include audited financial statements; projected budgets for the next three years (FY2018-20); an analysis of financial progress since the EER visit; the university’s enrollment management plan, including the last five years’ enrollments and projected enrollments for the next three years; and the university’s advancement plan, including a report on funds raised since the EER visit and goals for the future. (CFR 3.4)

As FPU addresses the issues cited above, it should be mindful of the expectations that it will need to meet at the time of its next Comprehensive Review, which will take place under the Standards of Accreditation and Institutional Review Process in the *2013 Handbook of Accreditation*. These expectations build on past practice and will include, for example, student success, quality improvement processes such as assessment and program review, planning, and financial sustainability. The Institutional Review Process delineated in the *2013 Handbook* also calls for institutions to address specific foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies close to the time of graduation; institutional planning with respect to graduation and retention; and institutional anticipation for the changes in the context of higher education. Although FPU was not using the new process in this review, on a voluntary basis it chose two themes – core competencies and the meaning, quality, and integrity of the degree – to address requirements of the new process. The college will be well-served to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* at an early stage of preparation for the next review.

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm accreditation for seven years
2. Schedule the Offsite Review for fall 2021
3. Schedule the Accreditation Visit for spring 2022
4. Require a Special Visit in fall 2018 to monitor progress with respect to recommendations made in this letter on: 1) communication and decision-making; 2) diversity; 3) strategic planning; and 4) financial stability
5. Schedule the Mid-Cycle Review for spring 2018.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that Fresno Pacific University has satisfactorily addressed the three Core Commitments to Student Learning and Success; Quality and Improvement; and Institutional Integrity, Sustainability, and Accountability, and has successfully completed each aspect of the review conducted under the 2008 Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to maintain its compliance with WSCUC standards and uphold its commitment to continuous quality improvement.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of FPU's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be posted in a readily accessible location on FPU's website and widely disseminated throughout the institution to promote further engagement and improvement, and to support the institution's response to the specific issues identified in these documents. The team report and this action letter also will be posted on the

WSCUC website. If the university wishes to post a response to the report and this letter, WSCUC will provide a link on its website.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that FPU undertook in preparing for and supporting this accreditation review. WSCUC 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,



Mary Ellen Petrisko  
President

MEP/ro

cc: William Ladusaw, Commission Chair  
Steve Varvis, ALO  
Don Griffith, Board Chair  
Members of the EER team  
Richard Osborn, Vice President