



July 8, 2002

Robert C. Maxson
President
California State University, Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd
Long Beach, CA 90840-0115

Dear President Maxson:

At its meeting on June 19-21, 2002, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited the California State University, Long Beach on February 4-8, 2002. The Commission also had access to the self study submitted by the University in preparation for the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with you; Gary Reichard, Provost-Elect; and David Hood, Professor of History, and found your comments to be helpful.

The Commission notes that CSULB committed to a review under the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation* early in the design phase for the new Standards and visit processes. Accordingly, the University faced the challenge of preparing for a reaccreditation visit while the new Standards and processes were being developed and finalized. The Commission commended CSULB's willingness to challenge itself in this way and the creativity with which it approached the task of working with themes that spanned the Core Commitments and the four Standards of the *2001 Handbook of Accreditation*. The University, in choosing themes, focused on topics of great significance and complexity: Educational Effectiveness in an Era of Slow Growth, Building Academic Skills through General Education, and Services to Students. Its treatment of these themes was thorough and informative.

As is noted by the evaluation team, CSULB displays a remarkable atmosphere of collegiality and trust. The strong shared identity and feeling of community is especially noteworthy as it exists within a very large University with a highly diverse environment. The focus on students, expressed in multiple ways, is an institutional strength. The senior administration is clearly in touch with student concerns. The President's extensive interaction with students creates a personalized environment that sets a tone for the institution.

The University's focus on students is evident in the steps that have been taken to improve student services. The actions taken in this area are an important example of the University assessing itself seriously and using that assessment to

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improve its functions. The changes are reflected in a decline in the percentage of freshmen on probation and in an increase in the percentage of students intending to graduate from the University. Assessment is now integrated into the operations of the student services division of the University.

CSULB, as is clearly established in the self study, is moving into a new era in which enrollment is not growing. The University's decision that it has reached capacity on the central campus requires addressing the challenges of steady state enrollment in a funding environment where new money is dependent upon additional enrollment. The University has carefully studied the consequences and has developed an enrollment management plan focused on sustaining diversity and quality. It will be important to monitor the effectiveness of that plan.

The Commission endorsed the recommendations in the visiting team's report. The following issues are highlighted for the University's attention:

Student Learning and Educational Effectiveness. The "culture of collegiality" that exists throughout the University provides a solid basis for serious discussion and analysis of educational effectiveness. However, the culture of collegiality must be joined by a culture of evidence of student learning if its promise is to be achieved. CSULB has extensive data but has not developed that data into systematic evidence to be aligned with questions about effectiveness; nor has it developed a framework for raising such questions. Furthermore, campus structures do not promote cross-program, school and institutional inquiry and dialogue about student learning. The campus must be systematic in its approaches to assessing student learning and use data to support change where needed. While there are academic areas on campus that have defined student learning goals and developed approaches to assess the attainment of such goals, such activities are not yet widespread or part of campus academic expectations. Even in regard to its own internal assessment grants designed to enhance student learning, the University has been able to gather only limited and incomplete information about what has been achieved. Given the level of collegiality, CSULB could readily share good practices in assessing student learning and so enhance organizational learning in this regard. The Commission expects all accredited institutions in the region to move well beyond surveys as a primary basis for the assessment of learning and effectiveness. CSULB should initiate actions that will responsibly and systematically evaluate the effectiveness of its programs.

General Education. The Commission has noted that the work the University has done to create a new General Education program. At the time of the last comprehensive visit in 1992, the team and Commission found that the University did not have a clear rationale for General Education and that it had not begun to assess the program. CSULB clearly took this finding seriously, creating a new General Education program organized into three levels: Foundations, Exploration, and Capstone. The model is convincing and has a strong underlying rationale. Extensive work is underway to certify courses for inclusion in the program. The Commission recognizes the work involved in developing a General Education infrastructure, but reminds the University that it must also incorporate learning goals and assessment into the evolving program to help ensure that it meets its potential. the

team notes, a General Education program should have a mechanism to change and improve. Such a mechanism is not yet built into operations nor is it being considered

Structures to Support and Sustain Decision-Making. CSULB values its decentralization, an approach that has worked well in many ways. Even within a decentralized structure, however, an organization needs to be able to act on, sustain, and evaluate decisions. As the team notes, authority for action on key cross-institutional initiatives (e.g., integrated planning, assessment, and programming) is not clearly vested in specific structures or individuals, resulting in disjunctures in institutional governance and evaluation. The Commission urges the University to review its systems and structures, strengthening and systematizing them to ensure that they support the institution's ability to carry out and evaluate decisions. There is much activity on campus that will ultimately be frustrated if systems are not developed to support the consistent implementation of policies and programs. As noted in both Standards 2 and 4, an institution is expected to be able to demonstrate that it performs its core functions and that it is able to act in an informed manner to improve its functioning and student learning.

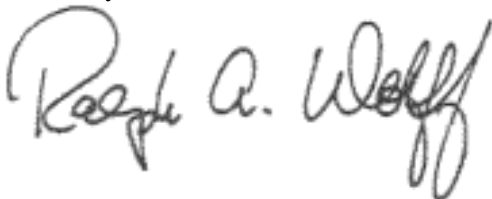
The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm Accreditation of California State University, Long Beach.
2. Schedule the Proposal for the two-stage review to be due October 15, 2006. Schedule the Preparatory Review for spring 2009 and the Educational Effectiveness Review in spring 2010. In the update provided in the Institutional Proposal, the Commission also requests that special attention be paid to how the University has addressed the issues raised in this letter and how it evaluates, or will evaluate, the effectiveness of its responses.

In accordance with Commission policy, we request that you send a copy of this letter to Chancellor Charles Reed.

Please contact me if you have any questions or comments about this letter or the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Woff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ralph A. Woff
Executive Director

cc: James Appleton
David Hood
Members of the team

RW/bm