



July 10, 2000

Alexander Gonzalez
President
California State University, San Marcos
333 S. Twin Oaks Valley Road
San Marcos, CA 92096-0001

Dear President Gonzalez:

At its meeting on June 22-23, 2000, the Commission considered the report of the evaluation team that visited California State University, San Marcos on March 6-9, 2000. The Commission also had available to it the self study prepared by the University in preparation for this visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and Patricia Worden, Interim Vice President for Academic Affairs, finding your comments to be very helpful.

The Commission commends the University for the important issues it chose to address in the self-study model it developed. The themes of Approaching Community, Building Capacity, Cultivating an Engaged Public and Envisioning the Future were sufficiently broad to allow for an examination of the entire institution. The Commission applauds the University for seeking to reflect critically on what it means to be a learning community. Asking the campus to consider what it has learned during the ten years since its founding and what further information and feedback systems it needs seems to have been a fruitful route toward institutional learning and improvement. The self study provides an important basis for the University to develop a common and clearer understanding of its objectives as a learning community.

CSU, San Marcos has the advantages and challenges of being a new campus set in a rapidly growing region. Since the campus was established in 1989 as an autonomous institution, it has moved into a permanent location, built new buildings, and grown from 448 to 5,743 students, from 12 to 128 full-time faculty, and from programs for only upper-division and post-baccalaureate students to programs from first year through master's-level students. Growth will continue to challenge the University, necessitating that it constantly and quickly respond to a changing context. However, the combination of newness and growth provides enviable opportunities for the University to chart a vision for its future and for the region in which it operates. As the evaluation team reports and the self study reflects, the campus is well aware of the challenges of its dynamic context and of the University's

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potential. The University is commended for the important recommendations included in the self study and is encouraged to act on them.

The Commission recognizes that in its first decade the University needed to develop its basic infrastructure. An impressive foundation has been achieved. Now in its second decade, the Commission encourages CSU, San Marcos to be proactive in preparing for the constant change it will need to address. The Commission urges the University to create the vision that will support it during the coming years of even more intense growth both within the University and in the surrounding region. It notes that the University's context makes it especially important that on-going attention be given to the communication mechanisms needed to connect the changing campus community. The current administrative searches, while somewhat daunting in number, offer the campus an exciting opportunity to build new leadership attentive to the opportunities ahead.

In urging the University to attend to the major recommendations of the visiting team the Commission also wants to highlight several areas.

Articulating a Shared Academic Vision: As the University community recognizes, San Marcos has been struggling to find an academic vision. The Commission shares the team's concern that the University, after a number of planning initiatives, still lacks the shared guidelines it needs to aid in coherent decision making and program development. The University has carved out a key and impressive role for itself in northern San Diego County. The community already seems to look to the University for intellectual leadership and as a participant in the economic development of the area. However, the University's lack of clarity about how to proceed with the development of new programs to meet the emerging needs of the county and the state seems problematic. The articulation of an academic vision and of structures for the development of new programs are essential in this regard. San Marcos has a strong core of liberal arts programs around which the University can build. As is noted by the team, the General Education program is well connected to the mission statement and could serve to tie the campus together behind a common vision of a San Marcos education. The University needs to determine how to plan for new programs and initiatives and how to define the balance between its commitment to the liberal arts and sciences and to professional study that is articulated in the mission statement. The current strategic planning initiative comes at a crucial time to provide guidance and to address concerns about the types of programs that are going to be emphasized. As the team notes, the creation of an academic plan is particularly crucial if the developing physical infrastructure is going to be able to effectively support student learning.

Evaluating Educational Effectiveness: The assessment and evaluation of student learning and campus programs is beginning to be a work in progress. Recognizing that the campus is at a very early stage, the Commission urges it to move assertively forward to take steps to build upon initiatives already begun, to support the creation of new assessment initiatives, and to further support the creation of the climate of trust that is crucial for evaluation initiatives. The

narrative system of program review, adopted in 1997, appears to be taken seriously but relies largely on survey data to assess student learning. Now that the campus has personnel in assessment it is encouraged to widen its efforts beyond survey methodology and to develop mechanisms to ensure that faculty have the support they need to proceed. The University is also urged to begin developing the information infrastructure to be able to answer its key questions, including those about the adequacy of its support for learning, the appropriateness of the academic plan, and the retention and graduation of its diverse student body.

Sustaining Capacity/Faculty Workload: The University is to be congratulated for its success in marshaling funds for the essential build-out of the campus. As the evaluation team rightfully points out, however, building capacity goes well beyond the physical development of the campus. The Commission notes that the University has been less successful in integrating program and financial planning and in dealing with the implications of moving from augmented funding to the regular funding model now that it is no longer a "new" campus. It is past time for the University to come to terms with the workload implications of regular funding and to move ahead into a supportable model. Recent changes that open the budgeting process to the campus and decentralize budget responsibility are both helpful steps in this regard and important in their own right.

Diversity: The San Marcos mission statement makes an explicit and substantial commitment to a multicultural vision. The diversity of the student body has also significantly increased with 33 percent of the 1999 undergraduate students identifying themselves as American Indian, African-American, Asian, or Latino. Survey data are presented indicating that the majority (74.5%) of San Marcos students believe that the campus is equally supportive of all racial and ethnic groups, although the self study notes there is some feeling on the campus that efforts around diversity have waned since the 1997 audit of the campus climate. Given the importance of this issue and its role in the University's articulation of its mission, the Commission urges the University to continue to attend to the campus climate and to develop additional strategies to move the campus toward becoming the multicultural community envisioned in the mission statement.

The Commission acted to:

1. Reaffirm the accreditation of California State University, San Marcos.
2. Schedule the Preparatory Review to the University in the spring of 2007 and the Educational Effectiveness Review in spring 2008. The proposal for the two-stage review is due October 15, 2004. A progress report on these issues is an expected part of the University's proposal for institutional review.

In June 2000 the Commission adopted a new framework for accreditation set forth in *Invitation to Dialogue II*, which establishes an accreditation cycle including a formal institutional proposal followed by Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews. In light of the action taken

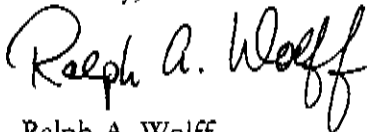
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at this meeting, the next accreditation cycle will occur under this new framework as delineated above.

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 and the action of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Wolff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" and "W".

Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

cc: Marilyn P. Sutton
Patricia Worden
Members of the Team
Judie Gaffin Wexler

Terry Allison

From: Carol Ensley [censley@csusm.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, June 20, 2000 5:25 PM
To: tallison@coyote.csusm.edu
Subject: WASC Accreditation and Campus Climate

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 20, 2000

TO: Cal State San Marcos Campus Community

FROM: Alexander Gonzalez
President

SUBJECT: WASC Accreditation and Campus Climate

There has been much attention in the media about one part of the WASC accreditation team report dealing with "campus climate." My comments have been used in these stories, sometimes inaccurately. I want to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

First, let me congratulate the faculty and staff for the overwhelmingly positive aspects of the accreditation team report. The team said "CSUSM enjoys a number of advantages that bode well for its future development and success: excellent prospects for enrollment growth, a diverse and interesting student body, strong and dedicated faculty and staff, and a network of community supporters ready and willing to help.."

At the conclusion of the accreditation team visit, I was told that concerns were raised by some members of the on-campus community, and by some members of advisory groups from off-campus.

I immediately met with these groups to hear their concerns first hand. As a result, I have taken the following actions:

* A consultant will be engaged to review the campus climate and to help us address these concerns.

* We will be including diversity issues in the campus-wide Strategic Planning Process.

* I will be working with LAFS (Latino Association of Faculty and Staff) to reactivate the Hispanic Advisory Council.

We are also planning a series of actions to reassure North County residents and the families of our students that members of the campus community are working together to address these issues in a peaceful and cooperative manner.

We are proud of the diversity of our students, faculty and staff. We have worked hard to develop and maintain a supportive environment that offers opportunity to every person. We value constructive suggestions and pledge to respond to them in a respectful manner.