



March 11, 2013

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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

Chin-Shun Wu
President
University of the West
1409 N. Walnut Grove Avenue
Rosemead, CA 91770

Dear President Wu:

At its meeting February 20-22, 2013, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an on-site review of the University of the West on October 14-17, 2012. The Commission also reviewed the Special Visit report and exhibits submitted by the university prior to the visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with you and your colleagues. Your updates and observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations. Following the fall 2010 continued accreditation, the Commission reaffirmed University of the West's accreditation and scheduled a 2012 Special Visit to address issues such as: an unclear university mission; the organization of the Board of Trustees; a lack of focused leadership; insufficient resources; unfair academic policies; unqualified faculty; and the need for a comprehensive assessment program. As a result, the Educational Effectiveness Review was rescheduled from spring 2012 to fall 2014.

The Commission would like to join the team in commending you and the University of the West for the positive steps that have occurred since the CPR visit in 2010. These are discussed below.

Mission. The 2010 CPR team found that "UWest needs to clarify and articulate its identity by addressing the perceived tension between its desire to be fully Western and its dedication to infuse and promote Buddhist values and wisdom." In response, UWest created a permanent Mission and Identity Committee that not only defined the university mission, but also ensures that it is the foundation for decision making and planning. The Special Visit team found that the MIC has both clarified and communicated the mission and values of the university on all levels. Another concern of the previous team was the perceived intrusive influence of the Buddhist Order on the university and its leadership. The Special Visit team found no influence over "academic curriculum, faculty governance, or university operations". The mission clarification process also led to the creation of institutional learning outcomes, values workshops, enhanced communication, and better accountability and consistency in decision making.

Board of Trustees. The Commission is encouraged that the board is engaged in multiple development activities and has expanded its membership to include more members with the knowledge and experience to govern an accredited American institution of higher education. Also encouraging are the additional committees that have been formed which now comply with the WASC policy on independent boards.

Leadership. The SV team observed enhanced stability in top leadership. Key positions such as the Dean of Student Affairs and the CFO are now filled with individuals with extensive educational backgrounds and experience. University leaders are no longer serving in multiple roles and lines of decision making are now clear and consistent.

Resources. The Commission acknowledges that the most significant turnaround since the previous visit is in the area of financial planning. The university is debt free and stable. Financial resources have increased significantly in the last five years. Net assets increased from \$16.7M in 2007 to \$25.8M in 2012. Cash assets have also sharply increased from only \$1.6M in 2008 to \$7.8M in 2012. The increase in resources has enabled the university to increase faculty staffing, student services, campus facilities, and infrastructure. Faculty salaries also increased during this time period. Much of these increases are due to an increase in the student body.

Academics. The CPR report raised concerns that UWest “offered so many programs to so few students, resulting in inappropriate overlap of coursework at different levels”. UWest has successfully suspended several undergraduate programs. This process allowed the university to focus, reallocate resources, and reassign faculty and staff.

Faculty. The team found a newly implemented Faculty Handbook which includes fair and equitable faculty policies including hiring, workload, advancement, scholarship expectations and professional development.

Assessment. The Commission found commendable progress in the area of assessment. An aligned and integrated system allows assessment of learning outcomes at all levels. Like the team, the Commission appreciates the progress that has been made since the visit in 2010. The Commission commends the positive steps and emphasizes the importance of achieving the following goals by the time of the EER.

Communication of the Mission. Although much has been done to better clarify and communicate the mission and direction of the university, the team found that effective campus-wide communication is still lacking. UWest needs to develop and consistently evaluate a better system of communication among its diverse constituents. (CFRs 1.1, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 4.1, 4.8)

Board of Trustees. The university should consider continuing to work with a consultant to train board members and ensure that the university board structure is in compliance with WASC board policy. This work can include assistance to the president and the Board of Trustees in team building and strategic planning. (CFR 3.10)

Leadership. As noted above, much progress has been made in the area of leadership. Now, however, a clear and well communicated evaluation process needs to be developed and implemented by the board for the university president. (CFRs 3.1, 3.8, 3.10)

Resources. The visiting team found that the university’s finances have stabilized; however, it did not find a pro forma financial plan that matches newly forecast institutional revenues with the institutional expenses required to support the anticipated growth. A strategic financial planning

and budgeting planning process needs to be designed, developed, and implemented before the next institutional review. (CFR 3.5)

Academics. The process of evaluating programs in light of the university’s mission, and of reallocating resources, and restructuring as appropriate, needs to become an active, permanent, and continuous part of the university’s program review and strategic planning processes. The Commission’s expectation is that by the time of the EER, UWest will have completed a full cycle of program review based upon assessment of course and program level learning outcomes and that the university will report on actions taken as a result. (CFRs 3.1, 3.11, 4.2, 4.3)

Faculty. Various faculty compensation components are still in their infancy and need further development. The team also recommended an increase in support for faculty development to create more expertise in assessment, and support for faculty research especially at the graduate level. (CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.4).

Assessment. UWest has begun collecting data across the entire academic program. Although data collection is robust, UWest must “close the loop” by analyzing this rich collection of data to make improvements in the curriculum, impact student support services, and inform the strategic planning and budgeting processes. The Commission also emphasizes the importance of clear reporting on enrollment by program and analysis of cohort-based retention and graduate rates as a fundamental measure of UWest’s educational effectiveness. Although UWest is going through review under the 2008 Handbook, the university would be well-advised to look ahead and develop plans to assess students’ levels of performance in the five core competencies. (CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8)

The university is commended for its progress thus far and urged to respond to the above recommendations, so that it will be in a position to document further progress at the time of the EER visit in 2014.

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report.
2. Continue with the scheduled EER in fall of 2014.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of the University of the West’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 the university’s web site 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 them. The team report and the action letter will also be posted on the WASC website. If the university wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WASC will post a link to that response.

As the University of the West works on 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 revised 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. However, the *2013 Handbook* also includes new foci: the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees; student performance in core competencies at the time of graduation; and more visionary institutional planning for the “new ecology” of learning. The university needs to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that the university undertook in preparing for and supporting this 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

RW/mw

cc: Harold Hewitt, Commission Chair
Vanessa Karam, ALO
Venerable Hsin Ting, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit Team
Christopher Oberg, Vice President
Michael M. Whyte, WASC Associate