

July 14, 2015

Jeffrey Armstrong
President
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0006

Dear President Armstrong,

At its meeting by conference call on May 21, 2015, a panel of the Interim Report Committee convened to consider the Interim Report submitted by California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly SLO) on February 27, 2015. The panel along with the chair of the CPR/EER team visits reviewed your Interim Report and the July 3, 2012 Commission action letter calling for an Interim Report.

The panel appreciated the opportunity to discuss the report with Mary Pedersen, Vice Provost, Academic Programs and Planning/ALO; Bruno Giberti, Faculty Associate, Academic Programs and Planning; Annie Holmes, Executive Director, University Diversity and Inclusivity; and Mauricio Saavedra, Executive Director, Institutional Research. The conversation was informative and helped the panelists better understand your institution's challenges and progress on meeting the areas cited in the Commission's letter.

The panel commends Cal Poly SLO for a very strong, forthright, and thorough report addressing the issues requested by the Commission. The evidence is strong that the issues have been taken seriously with major personnel and financial resources focused on finding solutions. The institution's directness and honesty in stating the issues and trying to find solutions without trying to hide any negative information demonstrates the university's commitment to continuous improvement of very difficult issues. The momentum developed since the Commission action is evident. Further commendations will be cited later in this letter in regard to the two issues being focused upon in the report.

The Interim Report Committee letter of December 20, 2103 requested an update on two areas:

1. **Diversity and inclusive excellence.** The Commission asked to receive a report demonstrating progress "in achieving a more diverse faculty and student body, increases in the retention, persistence and completion rates of students from subpopulations that have not been succeeding at the level expected of all Cal Poly SLO students, and measureable improvements in campus climate." From the report, it is evident that addressing these issues has become a high priority at the university. The report outlines areas of gain in several areas while outlining the challenge of making improvements in a community with little diversity and at a university focused on STEM programs with constraints posed by Prop 209 requirements. One of the most impressive accomplishments has been the establishment of the Office of University Diversity and Inclusivity headed by an Executive Director with impressive credentials and vision. Under her leadership, numerous initiatives are underway including the Student Advisory Council, procurement of external funding for scholarships

and support, the hiring of an Inclusive Excellence Instruction Specialist in the Center for Teaching, Learning, & Technology, the establishment of a First Generation Committee, the creation of a Black Alumni Chapter, initiatives to improve ethnic diversity among the faculty, staff, and students, efforts to increase retention and graduation rates for underserved students in order to lower the achievement gaps between ethnic groups and gender, and the establishment of the Cal Poly Scholars Program, MOSAIC, BEACoN Mentors Program, and the Cal Poly PEEPS Program (funded by a \$618,815 NSF grant), to mention a few of the initiatives. The panel appreciates how broadly the university is working on these challenges even identifying and working with the future pipeline of future students through initiatives at the K-12 level. The internal organization is truly commendable. The panel would encourage the institution to set quantifiable diversity goals for faculty, staff, and student recruitment and appreciated hearing that this possibility will be a central component of internal discussions. The panel also appreciated the strong work done on analyzing campus climate through the hiring of a respected firm to conduct surveys and focus groups. Finally, the action plan outlined in the report demonstrates specific steps being taken to make further improvements which show that the university is thinking beyond just the present but into the future for issues facing similar universities beyond Cal Poly SLO. The learnings have possible ramifications for implementation at other universities with similar challenges.

- 2. Assessment of undergraduate learning outcomes.** At the time of the 2012 EER visit, Cal Poly SLO had already demonstrated a strong program of assessing undergraduate student learning outcomes through an *Undergraduate Learning Outcomes-based Assessment Pilot Project* and through a *Student Project Assessment* focused on capstone projects. The Commission urged a continuation of these kinds of assessment projects in order to provide a foundation for accountability and quality improvement. The thoroughness of the Interim Report demonstrated that the university went far beyond what the Commission anticipated illustrating that the institution is not just committed to meeting Commission expectations but in improving educational effectiveness as part of its DNA beyond Commission recommendations. Many steps have been undertaken. The university recognized a need to strengthen the institutional research function so hired additional personnel. Efforts were made to encourage programs to see the value of program learning outcomes as having direct impact on student learning with a faculty consultant on assessment now working with individual programs. Assessment continues to become part of faculty culture with major progress made through workshops and faculty support. The panel commends the university not just for thinking from an individual faculty perspective but in keeping a focus on all three levels – program, department, and university – when universities more typically focus on one or two. With the new WSCUC requirement for the next visit requiring assessment of five core competencies, the university has pivoted very quickly to taking one of those competencies, critical thinking, and learning how to assess and apply the learnings to other core competencies leading up to the next review. As with diversity, the institution's thorough action plan for the assessment of undergraduate learning outcomes demonstrates both specific plans for implementation with timelines and an outline of remaining issues and challenges. The one recommendation from the panel is to continue thinking about how technology can be more effectively utilized in assessment.

After discussion of the progress that has been made by Cal Poly SLO in addressing these areas, the panel acted to receive the Interim Report with commendations and recommendations. The panel expects at the time of the next reaffirmation review with the Offsite Review scheduled in spring 2022 and the Accreditation Visit in fall 2022, Cal Poly SLO will provide an update on progress made in recommendations cited by the panel earlier in this letter.

The panel, again, reaffirms the diligent work and important steps California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo has taken to address these issues. I look forward to working with you and wish you every success as you proceed toward the next stages of accreditation review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Osborn".

Richard Osborn
Vice President

Cc: Mary Pedersen, Vice Provost, Academic Programs and Planning/ALO
Interim Review Committee Panel