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PRESIDENT

Ralph A. Wolff

July 3, 2012

Jeffrey Armstrong

President

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

Dear President Armstrong:

At its meeting June 13-15, 2012, the Commission considered the report of the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team that conducted the visit to California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly SLO) April 3-5, 2012. The Commission also had access to the Educational Effectiveness Review report and exhibits submitted by Cal Poly SLO prior to the visit, the institution's June 4, 2012 response to the visiting team report, and the documents relating to the Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) visit conducted in spring 2010. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the review with you and your colleagues Bruno Gilberti, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning, and David Conn, Accreditation Liaison Officer. Your comments were helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

Cal Poly SLO's institutional proposal outlined an overarching theme of "Our Polytechnic Identity in the Twenty-First Century," with three foci: 1) Learn-by-Doing; 2) Teacher:Scholar Model; and 3) Integration and Student Learning. During the time between the CPR and EER visits, the University experienced a major turnover in the top leadership positions but despite the challenges this situation presented, the University successfully maintained its focus on the overarching themes of the review and made significant progress in achieving the intended outcomes. Among these outcomes were achieving a growing consensus about what it means to be a polytechnic university, implementing a series of faculty senate actions about important academic matters such as learning outcomes and program review, and adopting several new initiatives to support student success. This kind of progress is a strong tribute to Cal Poly SLO's faculty and administration who continued to show great leadership, commitment and initiative during this transitional period.

The Commission's action letter of June 24, 2010 highlighted additionally two major issues for special attention during the interval between the CPR and EER visits: 1) further defining Cal Poly SLO's polytechnic identity; and 2) clarifying leadership structures. The University also addressed these two issues effectively before the EER visit.

Cal Poly SLO is to be commended for making significant progress in numerous areas identified in the EER team's report. As noted by the team, "In spite of all of these [leadership] changes the institution continued to show continuity of mission

while simultaneously looking forward to the future.” The Commission commends the University for maintaining strong faculty, staff, and student morale given the major reductions in state funding, balancing many competing priorities at a time when the California State University system has mandated major enrollment caps. The students are commended for voting to approve an additional fee to support essential resources for the “Learn-by-Doing” requirement in each major and to increase course offerings and expanded student support services. Cal Poly SLO also has demonstrated its commitment to educational effectiveness by adopting well-framed learning outcomes in most programs, employing effective assessment practices and a well-developed program review process, ensuring that students have access to faculty and effective student advising, and establishing support programs for freshmen and other initiatives that promote student success. The University is also commended for an impressive increase in six-year graduation rates from 65% for the 1996 cohort to 76% for the 2005 cohort.

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

Promoting diversity and inclusive excellence. Cal Poly SLO has faced challenges in the area of diversity. Among these are attracting and retaining students and faculty members from underrepresented racial-ethnic minority groups; bridging achievement gaps that exist for some of these subpopulations of students; and creating a positive climate to support students from underrepresented groups. While the University has identified this as a critical strategic issue and has engaged in several initiatives to address it, the team recommended that “Cal Poly needs to quickly and aggressively address these negative effects [of the climate] and actively increase the diversity of students, staff, and faculty as part of its responsibility to serve the citizens of California.”

The Commission supports this finding and expects to see 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 measurable improvements in campus climate. The Commission is encouraged to hear that you have made this one of your major priorities. (CFRs 1.5, 2.10, 3.2, 4.1)

Assessing and improving undergraduate learning. The Commission commends Cal Poly SLO for its *Undergraduate Learning Outcomes-based Assessment Pilot Project*, which was intended to assess the attainment of undergraduate learning outcomes by comparing learning results for freshman and seniors in five core areas: writing, oral communication, diversity learning, lifelong learning, and ethics. The results of this pilot were used to identify areas needing improvement in the curriculum and pedagogy. As a corollary to this project, the University conducted a *Student Project Assessment* to determine how capstone projects could be used to assess senior-level learning in such areas as writing and critical thinking. As the team observed, “these efforts lead to important cross-unit conversations and collaborations on assessment that have not previously been part of Cal Poly’s culture.” The Commission noted that projects like these position Cal Poly SLO as a leader in assessing the extent to which graduates have achieved learning outcomes in core undergraduate competencies at the time of graduation, which will be one of the primary foci of WASC’s reaccreditation model beginning in 2013. The

Commission urges Cal Poly SLO to continue to undertake these kinds of assessment projects to better understand and support student learning and achievement and to learn how to promote integration of knowledge and skills at the undergraduate level. This work can provide the foundation for both accountability and quality improvement, in keeping with Cal Poly SLO's distinctive mission as a comprehensive polytechnic university that seeks to prepare students for life and work in the 21st century. (CFRs 2.2, 2.6, 4.6-4.8)

Given the above, the Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Educational Effectiveness Review report and reaffirm the accreditation of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.
2. Schedule the next comprehensive review with the off-site review in spring 2022 and the visit tentatively scheduled for fall 2022.
3. Request an Interim Report in spring 2015 on the following issues cited in the EER team report: 1) progress in addressing diversity, including the diversity of the faculty, staff, and students, the campus climate, and the effectiveness of various initiatives to support diversity and achievement of underrepresented students; and 2) an update on the assessment of undergraduate learning outcomes. Progress should be demonstrated, as defined above.

In taking this action to reaffirm accreditation, the Commission confirms that California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo has satisfactorily addressed the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness, and has successfully completed the three-stage review conducted under the Standards of Accreditation. Between this action and the time of the next review, the institution is expected to continue its progress, particularly with respect to educational effectiveness and student learning.

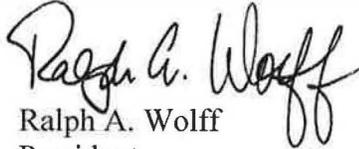
In accordance with Commission policy, copies of this letter will be sent to the chair of CSU Board of Trustees and to Chancellor Charles Reed.

In keeping with WASC policy adopted in November 2011, this letter and the underlying team report also will be posted on the WASC website. If you wish to post a response to the letter and/or team report on your own website, WASC will also post a link to that response on its website. Any link that you wish to provide should be forwarded to the attention of Teri Cannon so that it may be included on the WASC website. As noted in the Commission policy, team reports and action letters are foundational for institutional accountability and improvement. Institutions are expected to disseminate these documents throughout the institution for the purposes of promoting ongoing engagement and improvement and encouraging internal communications about specific issues identified in team reports and action letters.

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

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

Ralph A. Wolff
President

RW/ro

cc: Linda Johnsrud, Commission Chair
David Conn, ALO
Bob Linscheid, Board of Trustees Chair
Charles Reed, Chancellor, California State University
Members of the EER team
Richard Osborn