



July 10, 2000

Warren J. Baker
President
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

Dear President Baker:

At its meeting on June 22-23, 2000, the Commission considered the report submitted by the evaluation team that visited California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo November 10-12, 1999 and March 28-31, 2000. The Commission also had available to it the report prepared by the College in preparation for this visit. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with W. David Conn, Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Undergraduate Education; and Linda Dalton, Vice Provost for Institutional Planning. Their comments were helpful.

The Commission was pleased to note that the University undertook an innovative self study focused on the institution as a "center of learning." In doing so, Cal Poly seriously considered how effectively it is organized for learning, and how the community as a whole—faculty, staff, and administration—supports the intellectual and personal development of students. Through its research-based design, the self study created a provocative climate for institutional discovery, reflection and assessment. The institution's willingness to structure the visit in two stages enabled the campus, the visiting team, and the WASC Commission to focus on the two core elements in the region's accreditation inquiry: institutional capacity and educational effectiveness.

Additionally, the Commission acknowledges receipt of a compliance document whereby the institution fulfilled its obligation to address the spirit of the nine standards. The report, supplemented by its on-site review, provided the visiting team with sufficient evidence that the University demonstrates alignment with the standards and, within the parameters of the experimental visit, enabled the team to focus upon those issues identified by the institution as significant to the inquiry.

The Commission commends the University for undertaking this ambitious project, and acknowledges the depth and scope of the issues explored about its undergraduate and graduate education. Importantly, the Commission appreciates the degree to which the Cal Poly innovative study has provided the region with an engaging and insightful model of self-reflection: probing researchable questions framed to integrate across campus experience and culture; web-based data portfolio

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shared publicly to generate deeper engagement; and intelligent analysis from which the institution can pursue continuous improvement.

The Commission is pleased to note that the visiting team found Cal Poly to be a confident and compelling institution. Its confidence is derived from its academic excellence, talented student body, and history as a selective polytechnic campus within the CSU system; its distinct character is shaped by its commitment to the undergraduate experience and student learning, teaching excellence, and sense of stewardship for providing education for key professional fields to the diverse populations of California and the region.

The Cal Poly innovative self study was organized to explore institutional effectiveness as a center of learning by examination of the intellectual, physical, and social and psychological environments. The Commission commends the institution for the manner in which results of research and inquiry led to valuable improvements during and following the study, including the development of a new general education program; systematic linkage between program goals and student learning objectives; a multicriteria admissions program which responds to the impact of Proposition 209; and a new university honors program. The team report highlighted the positive impact of the self study on improved responsiveness in the areas of student affairs, facilities planning, and technology support.

The evaluation team reflected upon a number of important issues identified by the institution as critical to educational effectiveness. The Commission wishes to underscore several areas which it finds to be significant to on-going institutional improvement:

Cal Poly as a Learning Community: The institution chose the theme of learning so that the investment in the self study would position the University to move forward with clarity and resolve toward its vision of Cal Poly as a center of learning. The Commission commends the institution for its focus on the assessment of student learning and educational effectiveness. The team cited the 1995 document *Visionary Pragmatism* as significant in its establishment of key characteristics for a Cal Poly graduate, and its definitions of student learning outcomes, capabilities, knowledge areas, and skills. The Commission recognizes the critical influence *Visionary Pragmatism* and other key documents have brought into the institution's culture of evidence demonstrating institutional commitment to student learning.

The Commission urges the institution to sustain the topic of both student and institutional learning as an ongoing initiative of inquiry and action. The inquiry should particularly reside within and among the faculty; the faculty role is critical to the discussion regarding what it means to shift from being a predominantly teaching institution to one where learning is the priority. However, the Commission was struck by a comment in the team report that:

The team is uncertain about the extent to which members of the teaching community at Cal Poly have opened their classroom practices to [the] body of

research about learning and established a culture of inquiry with respect to learning.

The institution is urged to join the regional and national conversation about learning, and to support faculty through appropriate means of training and support. The Commission encourages the institution to build upon its teaching excellence, and on the "learning by doing" pedagogy, to create a learning community which is steeped in the strengths of the institution.

Assuring Adequate Financial Support for High Cost Fields: The visiting team acknowledged the challenge faced by the institution to support its high cost academic programming, and the resulting constraints experienced by the campus community. The Commission notes that it will be important for the University to be creative in designing funding strategies—within its own campus structure and within the CSU system—upon which it can move from a teaching to a learning institution. The Centennial Campaign celebrating the 100th anniversary of the institution augers an excellent beginning. The Commission encourages faculty and administration to develop funding innovations linked to its teaching excellence, institutional research, and long-range academic goals to complement fund-raising and development activities.

Campus Climate, Diversity and Excellence: The Commission is pleased to note that the Cal Poly community was experienced by the team as one united by its commitment to students and pride in the quality of education. The institution selected campus climate and diversity as an important area of inquiry for the self study, and discovered, importantly, that the lack of diversity is considered a threat to the quality of student learning. While the institution demonstrates high intellectual commitment to increase diversity among students and faculty and to improve the campus climate which would support it, the Commission urges the institution to reinforce and strengthen its efforts to integrate diversity goals within the framework of its learning centers. This is particularly important so as to position Cal Poly to fulfill its mission successfully within California over the next several decades.

Moving from Analysis to Action: The Commission notes with appreciation the depth and scope of self study analysis prepared around three themes the institution had identified as essential to its development: intellectual environment; physical environment; and campus climate environment. The self study presented a comprehensive and rich array of data which went well beyond the report of the team. Additionally, the team observed that while the University has been in a state of "readiness to be a learning center for several years," movement from analysis to action is needed and in many areas has yet to occur. The Commission encourages the institution to continue its reflective study, but not to lose the momentum that has been created so far, and to translate the results of research and data collection into an established set of priorities and decisions. Cal Poly's ability to learn from institutional inquiry, and convert that learning into concrete revisions and reforms, is critical to educational effectiveness and its vision as a learning community.

In sum, Cal Poly is now well informed by genuine self reflection and analysis prepared during its self study. The Commission congratulates the University for the seriousness with which it dedicated itself to the innovative study, and recommends that future directions are anchored to the wisdom and insight documented in the reports of the institution and the visiting team.

The Commission acted to:

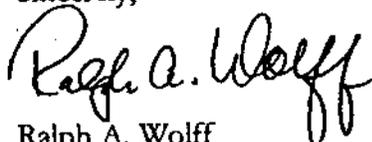
1. Reaffirm the accreditation of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obsipo.
2. Schedule the Preparatory Review for spring 2010 and the Educational Effectiveness Review for spring 2011. The proposal for the two-stage review is due October 15, 2007.

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 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,



Ralph A. Wolff
Executive Director

cc: Marilyn P. Sutton
W. David Conn
Members of the Team
Stephanie Bangert