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PRESIDENT
Ralph A. Wolff

July 10, 2013

Philip Pumerantz
President
Western University of Health Sciences
309 East Second Street College Plaza
Pomona, California 91766-1854

Dear President Pumerantz:

At its meeting June 19-21, 2013, the Commission considered the report of the Special Visit team that conducted an onsite review of Western University of Health Sciences (WUHS) on March 6-8, 2013. The Commission also reviewed the Special Visit report submitted by the university prior to the visit and the institution's May 10, 2013, response letter. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to discuss the visit with Provost and ALO Gary Gugelchuk, director of institutional research Juan Ramirez, and chair of the academic senate, Wael Khamas. Their observations were very helpful in informing the Commission's deliberations.

Following consideration of the October 14-16, 2009, Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) visit and team report, the Commission called for a Special Visit, scheduled for spring 2013, focused on five issues: 1) developing and implementing program review, 2) moving to the next level on student learning assessment, 3) building support for a culture of evidence, 4) planning and providing resources for institutional change and growth, and 5) increasing the role of faculty in governance. The visiting team found that WUHS had addressed each of the issues in the Commission's action letter.

The Commission noted significant areas of progress since the last interaction with WASC for which to commend WUHS. These include improvements in systems designed to aid in the collection, retrieval, and analysis of data; and matching resources with growth, as described more specifically below:

Improving mechanisms for collecting and utilizing data. The establishment of technological mechanisms and processes that support the institution's ability to gather, retrieve, and utilize data is vital for assessment of learning outcomes and quality assurance processes at all levels. WUHS has made advances in this regard: three program reviews at the master's degree level have been completed; the office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness has been restructured; a data management system with data warehousing capability was recently acquired; and standards for data collection have been established. The progress in these areas will enhance the university's ability to plan and budget resources accordingly.

Maintaining financial health during institutional growth. The Commission acknowledged the growth and steady development of the university over the past several years and notes that systems and processes are keeping pace with institutional growth. The visiting team observed financial stability in the midst of national and local economic challenges, clear budget practices, maintenance of support staff levels, and governing board acknowledgement of space and infrastructure needs. The Commission further noted with approval the visiting team's finding that going forward, "the new strategic planning cycle will focus on strengthening institutional infrastructures and program quality, rather than growth" and expects that this will be borne out in future interactions with WASC, including support for facilities and faculty scholarship.

The Commission endorsed the findings, commendations, and four recommendations of the Special Visit team, and wishes to highlight the areas below for special attention and further development:

Creating an effective faculty governance model. Faculty governance has been a topic of Commission deliberations and action letters as well as an ongoing concern of visiting teams for 12 years. Faculty governance at the institution-wide level is critical to a graduate-level university. Recent efforts – for example, the restructured academic senate, examination of institution-wide policies and procedures, and revisions to the faculty handbook – are all promising. However, the Special Visit team's report described "limited progress . . . in development of a more robust faculty governance system" and concluded that faculty members "are not engaged in the expected leadership role in academic quality assurance expected by WASC and typical of higher education." The Commission expects to see tangible progress in implementing a model for faculty leadership at the university level that includes, for example an efficient senate and committee structure, clear systems for peer review, ownership of institutional learning outcomes and their assessment, setting curriculum and academic standards, participation in new program development processes, maintenance of general academic policies and procedures, and participation in planning. (CFRs 1.3, 3.8, 3.11, 4.6)

Enhancing a culture of evidence and quality assurance. The Commission applauded the high standards of Western University in terms of meeting rigorous specialized accreditations throughout its colleges and programs of study. WUHS also has made progress in deepening its culture of evidence and putting quality assurance processes in place, in harmony with WASC expectations. However, work remains to achieve a mature culture of evidence and to support the progress made to this point. As highlighted in the team report, further steps include better alignment of program review findings with planning efforts and budgetary allocations, improvements in the assessment plan for institutional learning outcomes, more aggressive calendaring of assessments in co-curricular units and greater clarity in tracking of assessment results and shared best practices across the university. The Commission urged WUHS to produce strong evidence of progress by the time of the next WASC interaction, thus demonstrating that quality assurance processes are producing data, reflection, action plans, and budgetary support for identified improvements that contribute to the university mission. (CFRs 1.2, 2.7, 2.10, 2.11, 4.1-4.7)

The Commission acted to:

1. Receive the Special Visit Report.
2. Continue with the next comprehensive review, with the Offsite Review in fall 2016 and the Accreditation Visit in fall 2017.
3. Request an additional Special Visit in fall 2014 on the issues cited in this letter and the 2013 Special Visit report. The Special Visit will focus on 1) creating an effective faculty governance model, and 2) enhancing a culture of evidence and quality assurance. Progress should be demonstrated as defined above. In addition, the institution is expected to complete the Compliance Checklist (available on the WASC website) and submit it with the self-study institutional report for the Special Visit.

In accordance with Commission policy, a copy of this letter will be sent to the chair of WUHS's governing board in one week. The Commission expects that the team report and this action letter will be 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 Commission's action letter will also be posted on the WASC website. If the institution wishes to respond to the Commission action on its own website, WASC will post a link to that response.

Please note that the Criteria for Review cited in this letter refer to the *2008 Handbook of Accreditation*. The *2008 Handbook* continues to be available on the WASC website at www.wascsenior.org.

As the university 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 graduate-level competencies at the time of graduation; and more visionary institutional planning for the "new ecology" of learning. WUHS will be well served to familiarize itself with the *2013 Handbook* and to approach its challenges in ways that will address both old and new expectations.

Finally, the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for the extensive work that Western University of Health Sciences 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/gc

cc: Harold Hewitt, Commission Chair
Gary Gugelchuk, ALO
Richard Bond, Board Chair
Members of the Special Visit team
Keith Bell and VP Barbara Gross Davis, WASC Staff Liaisons